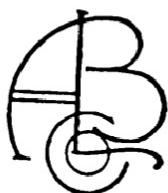




Scene from the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production "The Unholy Three," starring Lon Chaney.

The UNHOLY THREE

By C. A. ROBBINS
("TOD" ROBBINS)



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THE UNHOLY THREE

TO
SERENA ROBBINS

THE UNHOLY THREE

CHAPTER I

IT WAS a hot day. Beads of perspiration stood on Tweedledee's frowning forehead; and, although he rubbed them away repeatedly with a tiny silk handkerchief, still they would form again with military monotony and charge down into his eyes. Opposite him, on the other side of the tent, he could see Madame Fatima. She sat all slumped over in her chair—a mountain of purple, painful flesh about which a legion of summer flies buzzed wrathfully. Shaking her head from side to side, she shot vindictive glances from her small pig-like eyes at the Human Skeleton on her right—a West Indian, who basked in the fierce heat like some bronze snake in the tropical sunshine, and who repaid her attention with a triumphant but sickly smile.

On Tweedledee's face, first was mirrored the smile of the West Indian as he noted the fat woman's bloated hands and blood-shot eyes; but as his glance followed hers and became fixed on the

Human Skeleton—on that long, lizard-like figure basking on its platform as though it were on a rock beneath a blazing sun—when, as I say, he perceived the full animal pleasure depicted in every loose-lying joint of that bony frame—the light of anger in Madame Fatima's eyes was as nothing to the red-hot torrent of fury that poured out of his. He even jumped out of his toy chair, and, stretching himself to his full stature of two feet three inches, shook his tiny fist at the Human Skeleton and cursed him heartily in a voice like a squeak. At this the West Indian's thin-lipped smile broadened; and, shivering affectedly, he wrapt himself up to the chin in a heavy black robe which lay beside him. The dwarf's anger waxed into a consuming flame; his little round, shoe-button eyes flashed and his soft, chubby face writhed into a terrible mask. It was as though the expression of a baby had been suddenly transformed into the expression of a murderer. But his voice, issuing from between the twisting lips, was pitifully weak and ineffective.

"I wish you were dead, you human clothes-hanger!" he squeaked, shaking his fists at the skeleton. "I wish you were dead, and that I had done it!"

A grinning attendant approached Tweedledee's

platform and warned the dwarf to silence with an uplifted finger. "Cut it out, Tweedy," he said. "This ain't no way to behave! The people will be comin' in here from the big show, and dwarfs with gourches don't make a hit. They want to find yer smilin'. You remember what the old man said? You ain't so precious small that you can run this circus."

"I'd kill him!" muttered Tweedledee with his eyes still fixed on the West Indian. "I'd kill him!"

"If you was big enough, sure. But you ain't; and, what's more, you ain't so small neither. Why, Hop o' My Thumb was inches shorter than you, and he hadn't half your lip. He didn't do anything but just grin all day."

"An idiot!" growled Tweedledee.

"Maybe so," assented the attendant. "But believe me! he knew enough to keep his job. He wasn't all the time cuttin' up rough. Now look here." He laid a big brown hand on the dwarf's shoulder, spinning him around till the little, convulsed face looked up into his. "The boss will chuck you, if you start anythin'! Dwarfs, such as *you*, are common as dirt."

"Leave go of me!" screamed Tweedledee in a final burst of anger. "Take your hands off me, I

say!" He suddenly struck the attendant in the face with all the strength of his puny arm.

The circus man burst out laughing, and, picking the squirming dwarf up with one hand, deposited him forcibly in his toy chair. He held him till he grew quiet, and then, with a final admonitory shake of his finger, went off to join a companion at the entrance of the tent.

"Tweedy's got 'em again," he said in way of explanation.

"It's lucky Hercules ain't that way!" said his friend. "We'd have lively times around here if he was—lively times! But I wouldn't be handlin' Tweedy rough when the big one's around, Bill. They're pretty thick, them two. The big one thinks a lot of Tweedy."

"Who, old Hercules? Why, he wouldn't hurt a fly. God! but it's hot! Lady Fatima will lose her job if this weather keeps up. She looks like a piece of butter now. Lord! how that woman sweats!"

Now the strains of martial music wafted in through the door; and a half-witted negro, who posed as the "Wild Man from Borneo," began to dance and jabber. But far wilder than he, far blacker

than he, were the thoughts that danced and jabbered on the fantastic floor of Tweedledee's brain.

He sat in his toy chair, his chin resting on one hand—a ridiculous caricature of Rodin's "Thinker"—staring at the ground with black, unseeing eyes, while before his mental vision floated scenes of violence—scenes of daring—scenes where he was ever the central figure: a new transformed self. And this other self—this gigantic, towering self—would live on a pedestal of fear. Men would fear him! and he would read this fear in their eyes. He would frown, and they would tremble; he would stretch out his hand, and they would flee. Death would be written on his forehead; Strength would pulse in his muscles; and Cunning would creep with padded foot through his brain. So it would be, if he were that other self of his dreams.

O God! if this body that he wore—this caricature that made him a laughing-stock for the mob to jibber at, that turned his solemnity of soul into a titbit of jest for others, his anger into merriment, his very violence into the mimicry of violence—O God! if this body were only some kind of monstrous cocoon through which he could burst out

into the sunlight of the world! How he would stretch his wings! how he would fly away to the meadows! how he would mingle with the bright but evil flowers which he held so dear! And he would not forget what had gone before—the torture in the eyes of the curious, the laughter in the mouths of the fools, this pillory in which he had stood since boyhood . . . these things should never be forgotten.

All that he asked—all that he had ever asked—was to be taken seriously; and yet no one had granted him this simple wish. Most had laughed, some had pitied, but none had understood—none had looked upon him as a human being like themselves. No, he had been a doll; a plaything for all these vulgar children of the world—children who paid to see him move his head, open his mouth and speak—children quite careless of the inner workings of their doll—children of the materialistic world. And, as he had grown older, the inner workings of this doll had changed; strange transformations had taken place; the springs of good had corroded with rust; and soon the green mould of evil covered everything.

At first his heroics had been of a childlike character. He wished to be considered good, noble,

brave. He ached to become a hero. He acquired a stately carriage, only to see the people before his platform convulsed with merriment. He soon learned that this was an impossible rôle to play. Whatever he did was humorous. When he gave to poverty, poverty laughed in his face. All professions, except that of clown, were closed to him. Once he attempted to rescue a little boy who was being beaten by a larger one. He was thrashed within an inch of his life. This was a colossal joke. The whole city laughed over it, and it was given a leading place in the local newspapers. "Tweedledee is Trimmed," "Youth Will Be Served,"—he remembered those headings even now, and that was years ago.

And so the materialistic children had closed their eyes to the inner workings of their doll, but the inner workings had changed so much—so very much. Every one who has the ability to love greatly, also has the ability to hate greatly. Every one who has the ability for great goodness, also has the ability for great evil. A murderer is often a perverted hero. Tweedledee, perceiving that his heroism was ridiculed by his audience, turned to the other side of his nature. He must be considered seriously at any cost.

And this other self had answered him—this other evil self had spoken in a new, strange tongue—this other evil self, which had been sleeping, was now awake. Very gradually it had been growing in him for months; very gradually it had been gaining the ascendancy in his mind, till now it sat, enthroned, in the crimson robes of sin—a monarch who called to life the evil spirits of his soul.

Tweedledee, like all great egoists, must play a leading part on the stage of life; and if the audience were not pleased with him in the rôle of hero, if they laughed and hooted him off the boards, there was another part to play, as important, as serious, as awe-inspiring. If his personification of good had failed, his personification of evil should *not* fail. If his audience could not thrill to his heroism, it should tremble at his villainy. That too could hold the centre of the stage; that too could clothe his naked ego.

The body of Tweedledee had been formed by nature for a small part in the world's theatre, but the soul of Tweedledee had been formed on a larger scale. In it burned an insatiable fire—a fire that shone through his beady eyes as he sat staring at the floor—a fire that would one day flash out into

the world. Before it nothing could stand. It would burn and destroy. Strong men would tremble before it. That day was coming fast. Already he could hear its footsteps in the distance. It would touch him on the shoulder; it would look into his eyes, and then—then . . . If only the people had been kind on the night of Tweedledee's first appearance in the rôle of hero, if they had cheered him, if they had clapped their hands—why, then, how different would be the story that I am telling! And thus it is with us all: so much depends on our audience.

The grotesque caricature of "The Thinker" moved, moistened his lips with a tongue that resembled a vivid red ribbon, and lifted his face from his hand. Through the open door, a river of blaring music poured in like a cataract. The half-witted negro seemed carried away in it, and whirled about on his platform like a chip on a torrent. Occasionally there came a sudden lull in the music, followed immediately by a sound as though a thousand whips were snapping at once. The big show was drawing to a close.

Tweedledee could see the whole scene as though it were being enacted before his eyes—the people leaning forward excitedly; the volley of deafening

applause; the thousands of eager eyes fixed on the dashing chariots, on the stalwart drivers beribboned and bedecked in the pomp of Rome, on the foam-flecked horses. It was a soul-inspiring sight; and for the moment these charioteers were heroes—heroes to the children, to the mothers, to the fathers, to the yokels of the town—heroes snatched from another world.

And yet *he* had driven a chariot once—a chariot drawn by *dogs*. But for the moment he had forgotten, and had thrilled to a strange joy. That was the last night on which he had played the rôle of hero, and the pain of it had never died away. He had forgotten everything in the wild thrill of his part—a part that he was not supposed to take. The dogs were no longer dogs but Arabian steeds; the painted box on wheels a golden chariot; and he himself an exultant giant. God! how the wind whistled past his face! He listened for the voice of the waiting multitude, and lashed his steeds to greater effort. And then it came—the voice of the people—it came from a thousand throats; it came in a roar of brutal laughter—laughter that struck him in the face, laughter that beat on his forehead, laughter that closed his eyes in pain. He was on

fire! He struck out again and again with his lash. Fury enveloped his tiny body as though with a red cloak. He became terrible— laughably terrible like an angry child. The chariot sped on; the dogs yelped and leaped forward under his lash—and yet, no matter how fast their pace, no matter how he drove, the laughter followed him, caught him up, passed him, and waited—waited at the end of the race—a jibbering, painted clown with a wreath of painful laughter in its hand.

Then he struck out with his lash again and again! The dogs, now frenzied with pain, swerved from their path. There came a thundering crash—and he was lying on the ground. Dirt was in his mouth; darkness settled before his eyes; and yet laughter still echoed in his ears. Yes, it rang louder now. Thousands of pale faces looked down on him—thousands of pale faces showed their fangs, their cruel white fangs. And it seemed to him, lying there, that all humanity had left these faces; that the link of kindness, which holds man to man, had snapped between these animals and himself; that the blacksmith Time could never weld this broken chain. And with this realisation, a certain burden was lifted from his breast; pain stole away, and a strange

feeling of relief took its place. He arose and staggered out of the Arena, followed by a shout of laughter. He was never to return. In that single instant his soul had robed itself for another rôle on the stage of life.

But was this new part easier to play? Could he awe his audience; could he wipe out the grins from the multitude of faces; could he freeze them into masks—masks of horror—each one a painting of his own heart; could he, a pitiful dwarf, do all these things? No, it was impossible; and yet it *must* be done. Was it destined that he should fail again? Surely, so it seemed. Of late he had been fostering the evil in him and banishing the good, giving way to sudden gusts of temper, hating with all the venom of his poisoned soul; yet—and this nearly drove him mad—all his rages, all his curses, all his feeble blows, went for nothing, for they brought only laughter—laughter—and nothing but laughter in their wake. The victim of his rages, his curses, his feeble blows, as like as not would swell the chorus, till he felt engulfed in it as in a river—felt it bearing him away to the wild, tempestuous sea of madness. And just as a drowning man struggles against the fierce tide—just as he puts more and more

frenzied effort in each frenzied stroke—so now did Tweedledee struggle against this flood of laughter thundering in his brain. “If I only had a commanding body and a commanding voice!” he thought. “If I only had a commanding body and a commanding voice, why I would end it now!” . . . And at that very instant a touch fell on his arm.

Tweedledee started and a strange look came into his eyes—the look that a drowning man has when he catches at a straw. Two men stood before him—his two friends in the world—the only two who took him seriously. What matter if one were considered mad, and the other little better than a beast; what matter, for were they not his friends? They never laughed at him. No, they respected him too much for that. They took him very, very seriously. And so Tweedledee’s sombre little face brightened slightly, and he gave each of them a tiny hand.

“Tweedledee,” growled the gigantic Hercules, bending down from his seven feet of stature till his lips nearly touched the dwarf’s ear, “how’s everything with you, Tweedledee?”

And “Echo” said nothing, standing there with his large, luminous eyes fixed on the ground; but his thin lips trembled slightly, and the little wooden

demon sitting on his shoulder—the little wooden demon, with legs like a goat and the head of an old man—spoke.

“It’s hot here,” the voice squeaked. “The fat woman is too fat; the skeleton is too thin. Let us go out into the world together, Master.”

“And you, Hercules?” cried the dwarf, looking up at that great face hanging over him like a moon, at those dull, sleepy eyes like pools of muddy water, at that huge gaping mouth filled with yellow tusks. “And you, Hercules? Shall we be moving?”

“It *is* hot,” muttered the giant, rubbing a hand like a leg of mutton across his wet forehead. “Also the flies bite me,” he continued with a ponderous, thoughtful shake of his head. “And yet I sleep so much. Where else could I sleep so much as here?”

“In the graveyard,” piped the little demon on “Echo’s” shoulder.

“But,” continued Hercules slowly and laboriously, “the people come to see me. They like to see me lift heavy weights, and bend horseshoes in my hands. If they came here some day and found me gone, they’d be disappointed, they’d——”

“The people!” cried Tweedledee in a voice like a rusty hinge. “The people come to laugh at you.

You're a machine to them. They put money in the slot, and watch it work. You're not a man; you're a machine—a plodding machine."

"I don't know, Tweedledee," said the giant. "You may be right—you mostly are. But I heard a woman say once,—I heard this, mind you, with my own ears,—she said to her little boy: 'Don't drink or smoke, and you'll grow up as big as him some day.' It pleased me, that did. It made me feel as though I was an example of what a man should be."

"An example of what a *beast* should be!" broke in the dwarf. "A broken-spirited elephant—that's what you are! You stand there, day after day, in the sun with the people buzzing about you like flies; you stand there quite content if they throw peanuts at you now and then. But 'Echo' and I are of other clay. We are going out into the world as to a dance. We will take Adventure by the hand, and She will lead us. We will fly along like the wind; and, looking back, we will see that, which we have passed over, has changed somewhat. We are ready for the road, eh, my 'Echo'?"

"Echo" lifted his beautiful, girlish face; and in his large, luminous eyes the light of excitement was flashing brightly. "Yes, we will go," he said, "and

I will take my little friend here.” He touched the demon with a caressing hand. “*He* will point out our path for us, for he is wise—terribly wise. But listen, and I’ll tell you a secret.” He bent down till his lips touched the dwarf’s ear. “He’s a thief, and he stole my brain from me. Yes, that’s it—that’s the reason I have him beside me day and night. I caught him at it, and I’ve held him ever since. Sometimes he tries to get away, and then I seize him thus.” He plucked the little demon off his shoulder with a long, thin hand, and held it suspended in the air. “Now you’ll hear him choke. Listen!”

Then the mouth of the little wooden demon opened, and from it came a horrible choking sound, intermingled with inarticulate words and gasping groans.

“Ah! you hear?” said “Echo” with his head on one side. “Well, well, it’s enough. I must not kill him. What would become of my brain then? It would be silent; it would no longer tell me what to do. I would be worse off than Hercules. Well, well, Imp, go back to my shoulder. I’ve punished you enough to-day. But to steal my brain! O you sly one, you sly one! Be good now, and answer when you’re spoken to.”

"I will, I will, O Master," said the little wooden demon in a weak, trembling voice. "Just try me, Master."

"Very well. Why is a repentant sinner blessed in the eyes of God?"

"Oh! Oh!" cried the demon with a knowing roll of his head, "I should know that, Master, I should know that."

"You should. Then answer."

The Imp laid a wooden finger beside his wooden nose, and leered at Tweedledee. "Because he has so much to tell, O Master."

"Well answered, my brain. We must go now, for the people are coming. Good-bye, Tweedledee."

"Come to my room to-night, Echo," said Tweedledee. "We have our plans to make."

"And shan't I come too?" growled Hercules in sorrow. "Surely my friend isn't angry with me?"

"Yes, angry! angry!" cried the dwarf. "You're so hard to rouse, so hard to change into a man. But come, I will be glad to see you. Yes, the crowd is gathering. Ah, how I hate them all!"

As he finished speaking, people began to drift through the tent door. The circus was over; and, in the distance the band could be heard playing, "Home,

Sweet Home." Tweedledee's two friends hurried off to their respective platforms, and took their accustomed places. The one sat surrounded by heavy weights, sledgehammers, iron belt; the other by innocent blue-eyed dolls, in whose company the wooden demon appeared more diabolical than ever. He sat leering at their virginal, waxen faces as a satyr might leer in a nunnery; but they, with eyes turned upwards, seemed seeking protection in some supreme, omnipotent being, and never gave their evil companion a single glance.

Tweedledee sat gloomily staring at the gathering crowd, at the men in holiday attire, at the tittering women, at the round-eyed children—yes, at the children, for these he hated most. They were caricatures of himself. These little brainless beasts had bodies like his own. And because of this he was treated like them, would always be treated like them. To be a man, and yet to be treated like a child—that was indeed terrible! And they would grow, these children; they would grow and come back some day to laugh at him. But he?—why, he would always stay the same. Even now he felt that they knew this; he felt that they exulted in the knowledge of the future—in the knowledge that they grew larger year by

year—in the knowledge that some day as tall men and women they would come back and laugh, as their fathers and mothers were laughing now. Yes, he hated them most. Their piping voices, their pointing fingers, their curious eyes,—all filled him with a nauseating hatred hard to bear. At sight of them, he felt tempted to spring forward, to dig his fingernails into their soft flesh, to hurl them to the ground, to stamp them into unrecognisable bloody heaps.

At the very thought, Tweedledee seized the arms of his toy chair with a convulsive grip and held himself down. It grew warmer in the tent. It was as though these people, this herd of sweating animals, were sucking the precious air through their great, gaping mouths; were taking it from Tweedledee. His breast rose and fell; he leaned back, sick and dizzy; and he felt that his overstrained nerves were giving way.

Now the spieler was herding the people together, was marching them about the side-show from one freak to another, was pointing out the strange malformations of them all, was holding them up to the ridicule of the mob. He was before the Human Skeleton now—Tweedledee's especial enemy—and, strange to say, the West Indian took a certain pride

in his shrunken body,—a pride that sometimes nearly drove the dwarf to frenzy. Standing erect, like the lengthy shadow of a man, he returned the smiles of the people; then, still smiling, he bowed and sat down. The crowd passed on.

“Here we have Fatima, ladies and gentlemen!” cried the spieler; and that mass of purple, painful flesh lumbered to her feet. “Fatima, ladies and gentlemen, the human pincushion,—the fattest woman in the world! Ain’t she a fine big girl? How would you like to call on her some night, and have her sit on your knee?”—this to a smiling young man in the crowd—“You would, eh? But ssh! I mustn’t talk like that. The Human Skeleton will hear me. He and she are soul mates. That’s the reason they sit here side by side. Look at her blush! Ain’t she too cute? Well, step this way, ladies and gentlemen; step this way! Here on our right is Hercules, the gigantic man from the North. Watch him bend those horseshoes in his hands! We captured him while he was wrestling with polar bears on an iceberg in the Baltic Ocean. Watch him break that iron chain across his chest! Here we have the one and only Hercules, ladies and gentlemen—the one and only Hercules!”

And so it went, until the crowd had nearly circled the enclosure and now stood before Tweedledee's platform. The dwarf rose slowly to his feet, and stood staring at the white ring of faces. His nerves were on edge. He felt as though his body were a mass of throbbing wires, as though at any moment some strange spring would be set in motion,—some spring that on the instant would release these wires and start them trembling and writhing in his brain.

"Here we have Tweedledee, ladies and gentlemen!" began the spieler in his hoarse voice—"Tweedledee, the king of the pygmies! We found him in the wilds of Africa ruling over a large nation of his kind. We had some difficulty in capturing him, ladies and gentlemen, for he's as fierce as a tiger and twice as strong."

Through the laughing of the crowd, came a child's shrill voice. "Oh, lift me up, Papa!" it said. "Lift me up, please; I want to see the funny little man!"

A tall man in the crowd lifted the little boy in his arms till the child's face was nearly on a level with Tweedledee's. The dwarf glowered at it, and clenched his hands. Surely the spring was giving way at last. All the wires began to tremble at once.

How he hated this thing that was pushed at him!—this stupid little beast with sticky hands and dirty face, with staring eyes and drooping lips,—this disgusting caricature of himself.

“Oh, Papa!” piped the child, “he *is* funny-lookin’! Why, he ain’t as big as me! Won’t you never grow no more, mister? Why, you ain’t fierce! You couldn’t hurt nobody; could you, mister?”

Something slipped the spring in Tweedledee’s brain, and yet his body worked as smoothly as a machine. “I’ll try,” he said grimly. Barely were the words out of his mouth, before he kicked out with all his force straight into the child’s face. He felt the toe of his shoe sink into something soft, and then, with a cry of savage joy, he leaped back. At last he would be taken seriously.

And he was. For a moment the people, crowded about his platform, were as silent as statues. Even the child was silent till he felt the blood running down his face. Then he screamed; and as though this scream brought the others to life, they muttered among themselves and drew back. But not so the father. Red from anger, he handed the howling boy to his mother and leaped forward. In an instant he

had seized Tweedledee, and was raining a shower of blows on his tiny body—savage blows which quite convinced the dwarf that he was taken seriously. Through all the pain of them, a strange exultation filled him; and he struggled in the other's grasp like a little demon, using hand, foot and teeth in his defence. But suddenly he was rescued,—suddenly two mighty arms bore his assailant away.

Hercules had come to the assistance of his friend. Tearing through the crowd, as an elephant tears through a garden of shrubs, he had leaped upon the platform, had seized the father of the child, and, with a single effort of his arms, had thrown him out on the floor of white, upturned faces.

And this was not all. Some spring had also slipped in the giant's dull brain. The plodding beast was a plodding beast no longer, for it had tasted blood. The machine had gone mad.

Hercules in that instant became terrible. His face turned crimson; the veins stood out on his forehead like fat, twisting worms; his teeth grated together; and flecks of foam gathered about the corners of his mouth. For a moment he stood thus,—his great corded fists held high above his head, his bloodshot

eyes staring wildly at the crowd before him,—and then, with the inarticulate roar of a wild beast, he charged down upon them.

All became pandemonium. Hoarse shouts and shrill screams filled the tent, intermingled with the dull sound of blows falling on bodies. Men, women and children fled before Hercules. They ran from him like rats; and, like rats, they were trampled down—exterminated. The dwarf danced about his platform from sheer joy. “Kill them, Hercules!” he screamed. “Kill them all!”

But now other figures appeared on the scene—strong, silent men—acrobats, athletes, drawn by the shouting. They sprang on the giant. They seized him about the arms, the legs, the shoulders. He went down beneath a living mass of men, as a great bear goes down beneath a pack of dogs, only to rise again and shake them off. Bleeding, dishevelled, he tossed men about as though they were rag dolls. At last a rope was brought, and he was entangled in it. Falling to the ground, he was bound fast. He lay full length as harmless as a bundle of faggots.

And then the crowd breathed again. They began to examine their wounds. Five senseless forms lay on

the trampled grass; and among the rest few had escaped unscathed. Even the Human Skeleton had a badly discoloured eye. As he passed the motionless figure on his way out of the tent, he kicked the helpless giant in the ribs. Tweedledee saw this out of the corner of his eye, and, stealing noiselessly away, marked it down on the pages of his memory.

CHAPTER II

Six hours later, Tweedledee sat alone in his little room. The noises of the town had died away. The hurrying footsteps of belated pedestrians no longer echoed on the street; the sluggish trolley cars, buzzing like huge June-bugs, had crept into their sheds for a few hours of repose; and it was as though the goddess of the night, the pale resplendent moon, had warned the world to silence with a cloudy finger lifted to her lips.

It was dark in Tweedledee's room. No light brightened it; no fire cheered it; only a single shaft of moonlight, streaming through the open window, fell on the tiny figure seated in the tiny chair. It was dark in Tweedledee's soul. No joy brightened it; no heart warmed it; only a single shaft of evil, streaming through his steadfast eyes, found its resting place in the storehouse of his brain.

And so he sat alone with the night; so he sat, not naturally, not easily, but with a certain strained attention,—a human spring that at a sound, a word, a signal, would leap forward to all its murderous

length. And sitting thus, he seemed to listen to the darkness—to the shadows—to his soul—for this sound, this word, this signal, with all the terrible intensity of a gathering storm. What was he waiting for so patiently, so expectantly, so eagerly? The clock on the mantelpiece seemed to know, for its heart beat *tick tack, tick tack*, fast and furious.

Suddenly the dwarf turned his head with the quick jerk of an automaton, so that his face peered over his right shoulder. At that very moment the quick *tick tack* of the clock stopped, as though it were paralysed with fright. Back of his chair, in the broad stream of moonlight, in the very centre of this pale river of fire, Tweedledee saw the huge shadow of a man. And, as he watched, it seemed to grow and grow, till, like a hungry giant, it devoured the other shadows in the room. It grew immense, colossal, terrible. And, as Tweedledee trembled, as he cowered before it, suddenly he recognised it,—yes, it was at this moment that the ticking of the clock died away.

“Why, it’s my shadow!” cried the dwarf. “It’s mine, all mine! I am so small,” he continued thoughtfully, “but my shadow—why, my shadow covers everything!” And then again: “It’s so big, black,

and terrible! Surely it will be taken seriously by the world!"

As he sat there lost in thought, he suddenly became conscious of light footfalls sounding on the stairs. They halted on the landing for a moment, and then they came *tip tap, tip tap*, up to his door, and again they paused.

"Come in, Echo, come in," piped Tweedledee in a shrill, penetrating whisper.

The knob turned, the door opened, and another shadow glided into the room.

"I am here, Tweedledee," said a deep, sonorous voice which seemed to come from the furthest corner. "I am here, Tweedledee," said another voice—a cracked, feeble voice, evidently wafted through the open window. "I am here, Tweedledee," said a third voice—a piping, childlike voice evidently issuing from the chimney.

"Enough of your tricks, Echo!" cried Tweedledee in irritation. "We have more serious things to do."

"Then let us have light," said the tall, thin shadow by the door. "I hate the darkness! I'm afraid of the spectres which lurk in it. It is their silence that frightens me. If they would only speak—these dark

ones! But they will never, never speak. They only stare and stare! That frightens me—the look in their dull eyes. So I give each a voice, as I see them in the corners, beneath the chairs, behind the curtains. There are hundreds here. Shall I make them speak to you, Master—the old ones, the young ones, the babies with their throats all nicely cut like little pigs? Shall I make them squeal? Shall I, Master?"

"No, no, Echo," said the dwarf, "not now. Some other time, but not now. I'll light the lamp for you. See! they're all gone, Echo—all gone!"

He had risen from his tiny chair, and had lighted the lamp on the table. Now the dull, yellow light revealed the small, untidy room; the tiny bed in the recess; the little shoes beside it; the writing desk; the bureau; his own miniature form; and, last of all, Echo, standing on the threshold—his long, twitching fingers; his dark and brooding eyes; his nervous, trembling lips.

"See! they're gone now, Echo," the dwarf repeated. "Come in, and sit down. Tell me, where is Hercules?"

"He'll soon be here, Master," said Echo, stepping forward. "Ah! the light is good! It drives them all away. But Hercules will be here in a

moment, Master—good old Hercules! strong old Hercules! brave old Hercules!"

Tweedledee fixed those large, wandering eyes with his sharp, beady ones, as though he were grappling with that wildly whirling intelligence—as though he were binding it with the ropes of his sanity.

"How did he escape, Echo?" he asked slowly.
"Steady now, steady!"

Echo's eyes lost their feverish glitter, and became riveted on the dwarf. Suddenly he began to speak, hesitating between each word, like a child reciting a lesson.

"I did as you told me, Master. They left him in the tent, bound. I crept in and cut the ropes. I told him where to come. He should be here now. Listen!"

The dwarf's eyes left Echo's face. He approached the door and listened. Heavy footfalls could be heard sounding on the stairs.

"It's he!" cried Echo. "It's he! Hercules is coming at last!" And, like a child just let out of school, he began to leap about the room, to whirl around on his heels with outstretched arms.

In a moment more the door was thrown open; the doorway was blocked by a huge figure; a tangled

mass of hair was lowered then lifted again; and Hercules stood before them—Hercules, brushing the cobwebs from the ceiling with his yellow locks and making the boards groan under his ponderous feet. And yet this was not the face of the giant in the circus tent—this face, with battered features and blackened eyes, with bruised forehead and swollen lips—no, this was not the same face at all. It had changed terribly; and yet this transformation was not so much *in* the face as *behind* the face, not so much *in* the discoloured eyes as *behind* the eyes. Something that had been lying dormant in this man was now awake. The beast was aroused and bristling.

Perhaps Tweedledee realised something of this. As he spoke, his eyes were sparkling like pieces of jet in the sunshine. “So you came after all, Hercules?”

“Yes,” answered the giant slowly, “I am ready to go with you now, Tweedledee.”

“But the people will miss you!” cried the dwarf. “They won’t see you breaking horseshoes any more. They’ll be disappointed.”

Hercules lifted a huge fist to the level of his eyes. It was swollen, and bruised to the colour of

an underdone beefsteak. "Yes, they'll miss me," he said reflectively. "But I want to go with you, Tweedledee. I want something different than I have ever had before. Breaking horseshoes wouldn't suit me any more. There are other things to do—other things. I can't speak my mind; but you know what I mean, Tweedledee?"

"Yes," cried the dwarf excitedly, "I know! I know!"

"And we will go," said Echo. "We will go out into the world together—Hercules, Tweedledee, and I. What times we shall have together—what times!"

"Ssh!" said the dwarf. "Steady now, Echo, steady! There's one thing we must do before we go. What we owe, we must pay. I have sworn it! He, who strikes one, strikes all three of us."

"Yes, yes. So it is in the Bible," muttered Echo.

Hercules nodded assent, and clenched his hands till his knuckles cracked. "Well, Tweedledee?"

"Well, Hercules," continued the dwarf, lowering his voice, "the Human Skeleton is an enemy of mine. He exasperates me. He likes to irritate me. He——"

"Yes, Tweedledee!" muttered Hercules and Echo in a breath.

"He is also an enemy of yours, Hercules!"

"That bag of bones! How is he an enemy of mine, Tweedledee?"

"*You* didn't see him, Hercules," continued Tweedledee in a shrill whisper. "But I did. I saw him kick you while you lay tied. He kicked you in the ribs with all his might!"

"Ah!" said the giant in a deep-throated growl, the growl of a dog tugging at his iron chain. "He kicked me, did he?" And slowly his thick red fingers began to open and shut convulsively, while his eyes narrowed into two slits of steady, glittering light. "He kicked me, did he? Where does this man live?"

"Here!" whispered Tweedledee. "In this boarding-house—at the end of the passage." And then, as the giant tip-toed towards the door, crouching from the waist, his huge fists dangling below his knees,—as he stepped cautiously forward—the dwarf plucked him by the sleeve. "Just a moment, Hercules!" he pleaded. "I have a plan. It's so ridiculous, so simple! It will make you laugh. But listen to it; and then you can go. And you too, Echo. Come close, and I will whisper to you."

Then three heads came very close together in this little room,—a great, rough-hewn head; a tiny,

round head; and an egg-like head, running up into a point. For a moment Tweedledee's voice, low, insistent, like the buzzing of a wasp, could be heard —that, and nothing else. Finally it ceased, and was followed by a chorus of laughter. At last this too died away, and Hercules stole out through the open door.

"But my mind is not with me to-night!" cried Echo on a sudden. "That little thief has it, and he's locked up in my box at home. How can *I* tell what to do? Perhaps *he* would advise me differently."

"Let me be your mind," murmured Tweedledee. "I will advise you. I am the Mind, you are the Voice, and Hercules is the Body. Surely we shall fare well in the world, for where else can you find such a Mind, such a Voice, and such a Body?"

So saying, the dwarf reached up, and, seizing the hesitating Echo's long slender hand, led him out into the hallway.

"*Where else,*" he repeated, "*could you find such a Mind, such a Voice, and such a Body?*"

CHAPTER III

ON THE night upon which our story opens, if the reader had been walking down a certain side street in the small town of M—— at an hour when the dampness in the air proclaims the coming of morning, he might have seen three men approaching through the gloom. And if he had given them a glance—perhaps wondering why, like the other good inhabitants, these were not already in bed—two startling facts might have awakened his momentary interest.

The most amazing fact would have been the size of the man who walked on the outside of the other two. In the semi-darkness, he appeared like some gigantic statue that had stepped down from its pedestal for a midnight stroll. And though his height was appalling, his breadth was still more appalling. It seemed as though the town, the street, the houses, were too small for him,—as though this town were a toy town, as though this street were paved with children's blocks, as though these houses were in reality dolls' houses. As he stalked forward,

one's impulse would be to stand aside, while one's curiosity would whisper: "Follow him!"

When your eyes fell on his two companions, the second fact would strike you. "This town of M—— is a prohibition town," you would say to yourself, "and yet here is drunkenness staggering on its streets." And why should you say this? Simply because that figure, supported on either side by the giant and his companion,—that loose-jointed form, with dragging feet and drooping head,—was evidently the body of a man whose brain had stolen out on a tide of alcohol. "These others are his friends bringing him home," you would think. And then perhaps your interest would die out, and you would hurry on.

But if you followed them—if your curiosity were not swallowed by disgust—if, unnoticed, you dogged their footsteps down the street,—at last you would see them enter a tiny hallway, push open a little door, and vanish from view. And if you waited patiently for some time, you would see the two sober men reappear and walk off silently arm in arm. Then you would be satisfied. You would realise that you were right; that the helpless man was safe at home, that you could do nothing more than had been done.

And thinking this, you would return to your home; and thinking this, you would go to sleep; and thinking this, you would open your newspaper in the morning; and then, a line, a phrase, a word, would strike you—would strike you, as it were, between the eyes. And you would cry out: “What a fool I am! I was there! I saw it all! God! what a fool I am!”

But you would be wrong, my reader. It was your common sense, your wisdom, your practicality, that blinded you,—not your foolishness, your romanticism, your childishness. Tweedledee was an artist in his way, and simplicity was his handmaiden. When he dressed crime up as a nun, not one stray lock escaped to catch the eye of a stranger,—to arouse imagination, to excite interest.

“When you give the people conundrums,” he was wont to say, “you are lost, for then wisdom and curiosity are on your trail; but, when you give them commonplaces, the fools only are dangerous. When you commit murder, work in a butcher shop—and then you won’t even have to wash the blood away.”

A strange little man was Tweedledee.

CHAPTER IV

THE sunlight, streaming in through the cracked and dusty window-pane, fell full on Cohen's sleeping face. He awoke with one claw-like hand lifted to his eyes. Groaning, he sat up in bed, and, moving his head slowly from side to side, peered at the familiar objects in the room.

Like the clothes-dealer himself, the furnishings of this apartment showed the ravages of time. From the patched counterpane, covering his shrunken body, to the pewter pitcher, standing on the mantelpiece, everything seemed to be tottering on the brink of senility. Dust was everywhere—hiding under the bureau in tiny heaps, lying securely in the shadow of the bed, and covering the threadbare places in the carpet with a thin grey veil. On the table stood a half empty bottle of gin. Surrounded by the débris of a past generation, it had a gay youthful air of pride—it seemed to be saying through its wide-open mouth: "Just look at me!"

Cohen moistened his lips with his tongue; and his red-rimmed eyes fixed themselves on the clock

which ticked contentedly on the mantelpiece. Eight! It was time to be up and stirring. He had been drunk last night, very drunk. How his poor old head ached!—just as though tiny steel hammers were beating on his brain. Yes, he could almost hear the insistent throbbing. Gin was at the bottom of it, that round-bellied smiling bottle of gin. Did it think that it could keep Isidor Cohen in bed when there was business to be done?

One of the old Jew's spider-like legs slid out of bed, and a yellow shrivelled foot touched the floor. Soon another joined it; and then both moved rather unsteadily about the room, as the clothes-dealer picked up scattered articles of his raiment. While so engaged, Cohen groaned and grunted. On one occasion he had recourse to the bottle of gin, holding it up to his mouth with both hands, and drinking so greedily that several drops glistened on his white beard like hail on snow. As a finishing touch to his toilette, he ran his fingers through his hair, and combed it out with his yellow, ragged nails.

When he entered the kitchen, he found his sister cooking breakfast. She hovered over the stove like a bird of prey, her pinched nostrils dilating, her little greedy eyes fixed now on the steaming sauce-

pan, now on the kettle which bubbled wrathfully. A large black cat, all skin and bones, crouched furtively in one corner. It surveyed the old woman's movements with a commingled look of hope and fear. From time to time, its thin red tongue projected from between two rows of sharp white teeth.

"Good morning, Rachel!" Isidor seated himself and surveyed his sister's back anxiously. Like the cat, he seemed trying to occupy as little space as possible.

Miss Cohen wheeled about, and cried out bitterly: "You've been drinking again, Issy!"

"Just a swallow," said Cohen meekly, avoiding her bright eyes. "I was feelin' sick, Rachel. I had a cold." He passed his hand across his chest with a conciliatory gesture. "There don't seem to be any heat in my room lately."

Miss Cohen's face drew up into unpleasant knots. She had the appearance of one who suddenly detects a bad odour. "Bah!" she said.

"I don't see the paper," Cohen continued, anxiously seeking a loop-hole of escape. "Did the boy go and forget it again?"

"I'll see." Miss Cohen turned and walked towards the door. She carried herself with military preci-

sion. Her nose was the only part of her that seemed consciously to droop.

When his sister had left the room, Cohen's face relaxed. Benevolent wrinkles creased his jowls. Turning towards the cat, he beckoned to it with a finger as brown as a stick of cinnamon. "Here, pussy, pussy," he called, wriggling his beard reassuringly.

The cat reached his side in two bounds. Rubbing against his leg, purring a hoarse grating purr, it devoured greedily morsels of the stale bread which Cohen lavishly bestowed upon it. And he, bending over it like some benevolent deity, mumbled words of endearment through his beard, scratched its arched back, and in other ways showed a marked attachment. For the time being both seemed happy. Their contentment was destined to be short-lived.

Suddenly the sound of hurrying footsteps could be heard, the door burst open, and Miss Cohen tottered in. For a moment she stood on the threshold gasping, her wrinkled throat contracting and expanding from the emotions it contained, her face as white as the belly of a flounder. Finally she cried out: "Issy, some one's gone and busted our front door in."

"What?—What you say, Rachel?" Cohen blinked his eyes and regarded his sister with the stupid expression of a man who is groping for his wits. "What you say?" he repeated.

"Fool! will you come and see then?"

Miss Cohen seized her brother by the wrist, and pulling him from his chair, hustled him out into the hallway. There he found his worst fears realised. A great splinter had been torn out of the framework of the door, which now stood ajar, its steel catch protruding like the useless tongue of a dead man. Nothing was to be done here.

"Quick! Quick! To the safe!" cried Cohen. Darting into the store, he was soon down on his knees, turning the shining knob to the well-remembered numbers. His sister stood over him, white-faced and expectant. Click—click—click. Ah! Now it was open; and there, safe and sound, lay the snug little piles of banknotes.

"God be praised! We are not robbed—unless some of the clothes are taken." He leaped to his feet. He examined the shelves, the hooks, the corners. "No, everything is here," he muttered—"everything is here."

"Maybe you broke the door yourself, Issy," said Miss Cohen, walking to the window.

"I break a valuable lock? Me? Not exactly! But what is that you see in the street, Rachel?"

"It's a crowd, Issy; and they're lookin' at our show-window. All the school children have stopped. Why, now, they're pointin'!"

Cohen hurried out into the street. The crowd was growing fast. Now it numbered fully fifty. Men, women and children pressed their noses against the Jew's window, jostled each other with their elbows, and pushed forward at all costs to see what was within.

What were they staring at so intently, so eagerly, so expectantly? No crowd had ever gathered here before. Cohen knew what should be there—the wax woman in the second-hand evening dress, with her blond hair and brilliant cheeks; the wax child in the blue and white sailor suit; and lastly, the wax man in the brown ulster with the soft grey hat pulled over his eyes. He was as familiar with them as with old friends. Often he spoke to them as he dusted the show-window in the morning. At other times, he admired them as works of art. Standing

in front, he always marvelled at their life-like appearance. Behind them, of course, were the iron hooks that fitted into little rings of steel on their necks—the iron hooks that made them stand on their waxen feet so naturally—but in front, nothing of the kind was visible. What were these people in the street saying to one another? If he could only get through and see!

As Isidor Cohen pushed forward, a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. "Do you own this store?" a stern voice asked. He looked up into a policeman's heavily lined face.

"Yes, yes, I own it all right," he gasped. "Have I been robbed? Have they taken my dummies? Have they taken my clothes?"

"Come this way," said the policeman; and without another word he pushed through the crowd with Cohen at his heels. Now they were standing before the show-window, and the old clothes-dealer could see everything.

There was the beautiful waxen lady, her cheeks as red as ever, resplendent in the low-cut evening gown; there was the little waxen boy in the sailor suit, holding her by the hand, and there—but no. My God! this wasn't possible! It was the same coat,

the same hat, and yet the figure was different, somehow. His waxen man stood upright, held its head high, looked you in the eyes; but this thing that he saw—this listless thing with downcast head and dragging feet, this broken creature, bending at the waist and grinning horribly at the ground, this new and terrifying dummy—he had never seen before.

And, as he stared at it, as he stood there motionless, horror stole over him and breathed her icy breath down into his heart. God of Israel! if it would only stop its grinning! At that moment, he felt a dull wonder that the waxen lady did not seize the waxen child in her arms and fly from her grisly companion. How could she bear that fixed and glassy smile! Ah, what was that trickling down the coat sleeve?—what was that creeping down the cloth like some kind of crimson bug?—what was that splashing into a little puddle on the floor? It was blood, that's what it was—falling blood. His waxen man had come to life—had died—and now was bleeding.

And then, as is so often the case, the overstrained mind of Isidor Cohen was mastered by a trifle. One fact loomed up like a black cloud on his mental horizon. The Jew of him spoke, as it has spoken

through all the centuries. Above the horrified silence of the gathering crowd, the voice of the clothes-dealer rang out as clear as a bugle.

"I must take that coat off him!" he cried. "Right away I must take it off! The blood will stain it. It will be good for nothing!"

"I will go with you," said the policeman quietly, "and help you take it off."

The crowd gave way before them; and the policeman, followed by Cohen, entered the little store. Barely were they inside, before the clothes-dealer began to take out the wooden partition which separated them from the show-window. He worked like a man in a dream, with vacant eyes and moving lips. "I must take it off quick," he muttered to himself. Miss Cohen peered white-faced over his shoulder, while the officer helped him with the loose boards. At last the way was clear, and they stepped forward.

There they found it—the body of the Human Skeleton—that long, lizard-like figure hanging from the hook driven in its neck, that bag of bones which dripped its meagre life-blood on the floor, that West Indian who once had grinned at the tiny dwarf as now he grinned at death. Yes, it was indeed he. But

the faces of the people, staring in, were white—ghastly white. Only the waxen lady and the waxen child looked at it and smiled.

"Where were you last night?" asked the officer, fixing Cohen with his eyes. "Where were you when this happened?"

"I was out late last night."

"Where were you?"

"I—I," stammered Cohen, glancing at his sister.

"Oh, you come along with me." The policeman laid his hand on Cohen's shoulder.

"Look, look, Issy!" cried Miss Cohen suddenly. "See what's on the button there!" She pointed to the corpse.

The officer approached the dangling body, and, lifting the card which hung on its breast, scrutinised it intently. There, on the tiny piece of pasteboard, in a small but legible hand, was written:—

"Marked Down
And Hung Up
by Tweedledee."

CHAPTER V

MR. TOBIAS GRAHAM sat in the library of his house on Riverside Drive. It was a beautiful afternoon in early Spring. Through the half open window, a breeze, fragrant with the scent of flowers, stole into the room like a child bent on mischief. All morning it had been playing in the old gentleman's garden—enjoying the respectful salutations of the narcissi who bowed their golden heads in greeting, plundering the tulips with thieving fingers, and ruffling the arrogant, oriental poppies. And now it circled about restlessly, stirring the curtains, moaning as it found itself caught in the chimney, and then rushing out uproariously to fondle Mr. Graham's trim white beard.

This library was no place for such a gay trifling wind. Like its master, it was too old-fashioned, too respectable. It had an arrogant air about it—an air of resenting this informal newcomer—an air of satisfaction which had endured for half a century or more. And its furnishings—the tables, chairs, and portraits—were like thoughts in a com-

monplace yet well-ordered brain. There was nothing here that was bizarre; nothing to make one say: "How strange!—how original!—how new!" And it seemed a pity that—while everything outside this window was so young, so hopeful, so green and glowing—here, behind these sombre curtains, paralytic old age should be tottering around and around in an unending circle.

Mr. Graham sat in a stiff leather armchair. He had just returned from his customary walk on Fifth Avenue; and his face was still flushed from the exercise. He might have been sitting for his portrait, so unnatural was his pose. Occasionally, with an almost studied gesture, he stroked his short-pointed beard.

Suddenly the sound of light footsteps could be heard in the hallway; the door swung open, and a young man entered. "Well, I'm here, Uncle Toby," he said, advancing.

Mr. Graham, before speaking, looked at his nephew attentively. Like the noisy, frivolous April wind, Hector McDonald invariably had a disconcerting effect on the old gentleman. Those bright hazel eyes, that clear-cut, smiling face, lacked reverence for age, lacked moral responsibility, lacked

conventional standards—or so at least he thought. Even his nephew's fashionably cut tweeds and highly polished boots were an offence to the old gentleman's sensibilities. They conjured to *his* mind a flippant tendency to neglect the serious affairs of life. He saw in this young man a butterfly with outstretched wings. And, with the inconsistency of age judging youth, peering out through the barred window of time, light laughter and ready smiles were to him unpardonable.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" asked McDonald.

"Yes," said Mr. Graham, pursing his lips and then drawing them into two straight lines. "I think the time has come when you should have reached a decision. Six months ago I suggested that you enter Arlington's office. Then you seemed determined on another course of action—a course of action directly opposed to my wishes and judgment. Well?"

McDonald flushed. His uncle's tone was so icy, those grey eyes were so cold and unfeeling, that figure sitting in the armchair was so stiff and unapproachable, that he felt any plea for his own viewpoint would be absolutely lost and thrown

away. "I can only say now, what I said then," he answered.

"And you still wish to write for a living?"

"Yes."

Mr. Graham's beard trembled slightly. "And you know what I think of your ambition?"

"Yes."

"Very well." The old gentleman rose to his feet and bowed stiffly. "I wish you a very good-afternoon," he said.

"Oh, I say, Uncle Toby!" cried McDonald in surprise. "What are you doing? Turning me out?"

"Such an inference does your imagination credit," said the old man grimly. "I don't intend to be a crutch for decrepit genius. Follow my wishes, and you may remain; disobey my commands, and you shall go. You are no longer a child. You are of age and should be self-supporting. When your mother died, I had you educated to the best of my ability. I tried to make a man of you. If I have failed—well—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"But don't you think you're hard on me, Uncle Toby?" asked the young man with a smile which was half a grimace of dismay. "We all have our

idiosyncrasies. I am an artist; so why make a business man out of me? You have a love for the beautiful, yourself, Uncle Toby, if you'd only let it grow. You bottle up all your emotions till they turn sour. Now there's that collection of rubies you have—the best in the country, I've been told. Surely they show that you have some latent spark of poetic fire. You don't love them just because they're worth a lot of money, do you?"

"Good-afternoon, sir," said his uncle sternly.

"Of course," the young man continued, "rubies are only rubies after all. At the best, they are cold crystallised thoughts. And they are dangerous to have about. They might make a criminal of one. They might make a thief of you, Uncle Toby."

"Good-afternoon, sir."

"But you don't get my meaning!" What a stick his uncle was!—so formal and stiff in every gesture, so much like a dressed-up poker, so absolutely devoid of all nonsense, that McDonald often felt like rumpling the old gentleman's hair. "No, you don't get my meaning," he repeated. "I was not speaking at random when I said you might rob some one. And what a theft that would be! You'd not rob them of mere money; you'd rob them

of a priceless possession—something that you would never be able to give back again. You would rob them of their honesty by the temptation of those rubies. Some day I will reverse the order of things—some day the pickpocket will not be tried for stealing a wealthy man's purse; no, but the wealthy man will be tried for exposing the pickpocket to temptation. What do you think of that, Uncle Toby?"

"Good-afternoon," said Mr. Graham in a louder tone than he had used hitherto.

McDonald laughed, and then suddenly stopped. The muscles about his firm set jaw twitched slightly. "All right," he said, "I'm off. You're impossible to get along with, Uncle Toby. You're not a man; you're a sign-post on the road of respectability. And don't think for a minute that I'm coming back here in a few days to eat out of your hand! If you do, you are greatly mistaken. Win or lose, I'm through, Uncle Toby. I'll send for my things to-morrow."

"Good-afternoon," said Mr. Graham.

"Good-afternoon!" cried McDonald hotly. He strode to the door, and, throwing it open, slammed it behind him. Soon the sound of his footsteps died away.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Hector McDonald left his uncle's house, the sun was still high in the heavens. Two streams of automobiles flowed past in opposite directions. The wealth of New York was taking advantage of the fine weather to display itself. The air was resonant with the hum of well-oiled machinery, the footsteps of loitering pedestrians, the shrill voices of children. One caught sight of old men, in frock-coats and high silk hats, walking briskly and swinging their canes with a jaunty mien. Nurse-maids and baby carriages were everywhere. And above it all, a spotless sky smiled down on the city.

The young man's anger soon melted away. On such an afternoon, it was well-nigh impossible to harbour malice. Uncle Tobias, like other shadows, vanished in this glorious spring sunshine. At twenty-three, one is a mirror reflecting only momentarily the clouds that pass:

Hector McDonald, up to this, had not come into violent contact with the world. During all his twenty-three years, he had never found himself in

want of any material luxury. At school, at college, his uncle had given him a liberal allowance which he had spent generously. He knew nothing of poverty—it had never come into his calculations. And now it seemed a very tiny speck, afar off on a limitless background. He had two hundred dollars in his pocket—the remainder of his month's allowance—and quite sufficient for his wants until he should be able to make more.

And there was no doubt in Hector McDonald's mind that he would make more—a great deal more. Fresh from college, where he had been editor of the *Year Book*, president of the "Literary Society," and prominent contributor to *The Collegian*, was it any wonder that the young man's mental horizon was limited? The four walls of his Alma Mater had, until lately, encompassed his world; and their benign shadows still rested on him. Had not Professor Snow taken him aside on one memorable occasion and said: "McDonald, you have a future." He had written books on literature, and he should know.

And after he had had such encouragement, after he had sat up night after night writing short stories that were to astonish the world, after he had taken all his friends into his confidence, Uncle Tobias had

curtly told him that he must go into Mr. Arlington's office. What an absurdity that was! He could imagine himself sitting in that ogre's den—that ogre who disliked him heartily—sitting there and writing figures in a ledger, servile, obedient, running about at any one's beck and call. Such a life, for a man of gifts and spirit, was unendurable! If his mother had lived, she would never have consented to see him become a slave. No, she would have understood him, she would have encouraged him, she would have told her brother not to interfere. He remembered her as a tall, authoritative lady—a lady who had sometimes ordered other people about, but who had never ordered him. Even Uncle Tobias had been a little in awe of her. He recollects that on one occasion, when quite a small boy, he had used the old gentleman's hat as a football with perfect impunity. Hector smiled at the remembrance, and strode on.

And then there was Dorothy Arlington. For a year, they had been unobtrusively engaged. He had told her all his hopes, all his ambitions. And she believed in him. She was confident that he would be a great man one day. What would she think of him if he knuckled under, if he gave up all claim

to an individuality of his own, if he entered her father's office? Surely she would lose faith in him. He would sink in her estimation to the level of the average young man—the young man whom she met at dances and entertainments—the young man who talked business, bridge, horses, dogs, and nothing else. No, he would write; his uncle could not force him to renounce his ambitions.

McDonald came to a sudden determination. He would go to Dorothy and tell her everything. He felt sure that she would applaud his decision. He drew out his watch and looked at it. It was just four. Mr. Arlington would not be home from the office as yet—that was a satisfaction. There was open hostility existing between them, which made chance meetings rather strained. He realised perfectly that the financier considered him a butterfly, and, with natural perversity, did all in his power to further this belief. Yes, he would go and see her now.

By this time, he was nearing Fifth Avenue. Walking down a side street, he passed a small bird store. In the window, were at least a dozen cages—each inhabited by a large green parrot. They gazed out through the bars with solemn yellow

eyes. Gloomy captives, with ruffled plumage and despondent-drooping wings, they silently implored the passer-by to pity them; to loose his purse-string and take them out into the world.

At another time the young man would have stopped to look at them, for, like a child, he was invariably fascinated by bird-stores; but to-day he could see the Arlington house in the distance, so he hurried on. And yet, although he had passed it by so unceremoniously, it was to be visualised again and again in his thoughts; to recur in the strange events which were to follow, like the motif in some weird musical *mélange*. McDonald was to see many bird-stores in the years to come, but never one without an involuntary shudder.

CHAPTER VII

McDONALD sat in the living-room of the Arlington house, awaiting the appearance of his hostess. The air was fragrant with the scent of Easter lilies, which bowed their pure pale faces in the window. All about him were the rich furnishings that boundless wealth, directed by excellent taste, can alone command. A Persian rug stretched beneath his feet, as soft and yielding to the touch as swansdown. On the wall, hung several portraits of by-gone Arlingtons—women with powdered hair, holding bright fans with their slender, tapering fingers; men of florid complexions and prominent chins, wearing swords, wigs and epaulets. The chairs and tables, like these portraits, dated back to the colonial days. Black with age, they added a certain severity to the apartment quite in keeping with its master.

Suddenly the heavy portières divided, and Miss Arlington entered. She was a tall dark girl of nineteen—a girl who would have been strikingly handsome were it not for a rather prominent chin which she had inherited from her father. There was a

pleasing frankness in her direct glance, a careless masculinity of stride which suggested the grown-up tom-boy. Young men called her a "good fellow," and sought her out as a partner in tennis or golf. Only McDonald had discovered that she was artistic.

"Hello, Hector," she said advancing.

McDonald rose, and clasped her outstretched hand. "I've got some fine news for you, Dorothy. Uncle Tobias has thrown me out."

"What!" Miss Arlington seated herself, and regarded the young man with a look of mingled astonishment and alarm. "What do you mean, Hector?"

"Simply what I say—he's turned me out."

"But what reason could he possibly have? You haven't changed in any way during the last three months."

"No, I haven't, and that's the reason he *has* turned me out," said the young man bitterly. "Four months ago he told me to take a position in your father's office. I naturally refused, intending to write. He gave me time to think it over, saying that if I didn't knuckle under he'd cut off my allowance. I thought he was bluffing then. Well, this afternoon, he called me into his library and asked me what I had decided to do. What could I say, Dorothy?"

Miss Arlington hesitated a moment before replying. Frowning, and tapping the floor with her foot, she seemed to be plunged in thought. Finally she lifted her frank blue eyes to his face. "There was only one thing to tell him, Hector—the truth."

"I did," said the young man moodily. "But honesty doesn't seem to have any effect on Uncle Toby—he's as impervious to it as an icicle. It's impossible to thaw him, Dorothy."

"Perhaps you didn't take the right way with him," the girl suggested. "Old people demand deference from their young relatives. If they don't get it, they generally kick up a row. Take father, for instance. Sometimes he's like a cat—you've got to stroke him just so. That's the reason he doesn't like you, Hector,—you're too flippant with him. Because you don't respect his white hairs, he calls you 'The Musical-Comedy Man.' "

McDonald smiled. "Does he? Why, I never thought he had enough imagination to invent a nickname. Well, anyhow, Uncle Tobias and I have split up."

"What did you say to him?"

"Oh, I told him that I didn't intend going into your father's office. Then he grew so ridiculous, so frigid, so inhuman, that I couldn't resist chaffing

him a bit about his rubies. And all the time he sat there with a face as blank of expression as a tombstone, mumbling: ‘Good-afternoon, good-afternoon, good-afternoon,’ till it got on my nerves and I bolted.”

“And won’t he take you back again?”

“But I don’t want to go back!” cried the young man. “I’m going to write and make my own living in the world. Don’t you understand, Dorothy?”

“Of course *I* know you will, but father won’t. He’ll make us postpone our wedding until I’m of age—nearly two years from now.”

McDonald’s face became overcast, gloomy. “Yes, I guess you’re right,” he said slowly,—“unless I make good very soon. Still, there’s money to be made in short stories; and I’ve written twelve in the last three months. You see I’m getting business-like and practical, Dorothy.”

“Have you sent any of them to the magazines yet?”

“No, but I intend to.”

“What kind of stories are they, Hector?”

“Mystery and murder stories mostly. I’ve got talent that way. I think I was born a natural detective. Only last night, as I was walking along Riverside Drive, I saw a murderous-looking little

man stealing on before me in the gloom. There was something about him that made me shudder and yet tingle all over—the same kind of feeling the hound must have when he catches sight of the fox. Well, I followed him; and sure enough, when he came to Uncle Toby's house, he darted down into the basement. 'Ah,' I said to myself, 'here's where I catch a criminal red-handed.' I followed him and laid my hand on his shoulder, just as he was pushing something through the door."

"Oh, what was it, Hector?" cried Dorothy breathlessly. "An infernal machine? Was he a murderer?"

"No, Dorothy," said Hector, "what he pushed through the door was only a bottle of milk; the man turned out to be the milkman. Yet, for all that, my suspicions of his guilt were well founded when I had my coffee at breakfast. You can imagine how violent my sensations would be if I encountered a murderer, when a milkman could affect me so. It's kind of a gift, I suppose."

"You're absurd, Hector! But I'd like to read one of your stories."

"You wouldn't sleep for a week if you did. Just think, if we were married you could help me write them."

"If we were married," repeated Dorothy thought-

fully, "that would be happiness. If we only had money enough we could have——"

But just at this moment, childish tottering footsteps were heard in the hallway; and a little red-cheeked boy of three or four years stumbled over the threshold into Dorothy's arms.

"A prophecy!" murmured McDonald; and Miss Arlington flushed and bit her lip.

"O Aunt Dorothy," piped the child, "mother says I can have a parrot like I seen in the window—a gween parrot with red on its wings! She said they talk most as plain as me."

"And where are you going to get this wonderful bird, Tommy?"

"Don't know; but to-morrow mother and me is going to look."

"Come here, Tommy," said Hector. "You know me, don't you?"

"Yes," answered the child, "I knows you. You is the man Aunt Dorothy told me to call 'Uncle Hector.' "

"Right you are, my son. Now you want to get a real live parrot, don't you? Well, I'll go to Africa to-night, and, if I have any luck, I ought to find one perching on the branch of a palm. I'll grab him

by the tail feathers, and if he swears, I'll know that he's the one you want, so I'll bring him back to you."

"What will mother say when he swears?"

"A parrot is a privileged person," said Hector gravely. "The more he swears, why, the better he's liked. Curses fall from his lips like drops of honey; and the wickeder he is, like the money kings, the more he's worth. But in the darkest depths of the jungle I will discourse with the feathery inmates; and him, who brings the blush of innocence to my cheeks, I will carry back to you, my little friend."

"I likes you, Uncle Hector!" cried the child, stretching out his arms to the young man. "Don't forget, Uncle Hector—bring the wickedest!"

An hour later Hector McDonald, after a fond farewell to the youthful aunt and blissful nephew, sallied out into the twilight of early Spring. The resounding footsteps of the hurrying pedestrians, the tooting of automobile horns, the jangling of trolley-cars, the muttering of the great city—all fell on the young man's ears unheeded. He was living in those earlier, enchanted moments of love, when imaginative youth is enveloped in the canopy of fancy, and all other things are as shadows. Perhaps the most acute sensation in an affair of the heart is that ego-

feeding germ which springs to life—that ego-feeding germ which makes heroes of us all, turning the dull feet of fact into the land of romance and guiding the lagging footsteps into brilliant, unknown paths.

Hector McDonald was living on that exalted pinnacle of life. As he walked along the darkening street, all his annoyances were forgotten; and in their place, before his mental vision, was pictured the scene that he had just left: Dorothy Arlington sitting with the firelight on her hair, her chubby nephew beside her. At that moment he felt almost like a father to the child. Youth and age are the loneliest periods of life, when one looks either forward or backward to a state of companionship that loses nothing of enchantment by the distance of the years.

As he hurried on, dreaming of the future, memory suddenly touched him with her lash. He awoke to reality. "By Jove!" he thought, "I'd forgotten all about the parrot! Where was it I saw that bird-store? Oh, yes, it was down this side-street—I'll go in and have a look around."

CHAPTER VIII

MCDONALD invariably looked through the windows of a store before he entered, like a general reconnoitring the enemy; and so now, true to his custom, he tried to peer through the dusty pane. He could make out little except that there was a light burning within, against which the ruffled forms of sleeping parrots stood out in gloomy silhouettes. Although he pressed his nose to the glass like a child of ten, he could see nothing more. Finally he turned the handle of the door and entered.

For a moment he stood on the threshold, blinking the blackness of the night out of his eyes. The room was small, and filled with all sorts of cages and boxes. Before the window, hung the line of parrots —now blinking their fierce yellow eyes, and stretching themselves lazily. Further back was a multitude of canaries; while one coal-black raven—sombre, austere—sat sedately on his perch, ruling all the others in his sable robes of majesty. This bird stared haughtily at Hector as though saying: "And who are you?" On the floor were boxes, large and small,

from which came a never-ending chorus of grunts and squeaks.

Beside these birds and animals, there was not another inmate of the room—neither man, woman, nor child—and Hector, the cynosure of all these bright eyes, felt unaccountably ill at ease. He began to fidget with his hat, and moved his feet about restlessly. He coughed loudly—hoping to attract some human being to the place. He remembered of hearing a story, when a child, about a hunter who dreamed that he was being judged by all the animals he had slain; and he knew that he now must be feeling very much as that hunter had felt. His vivid imagination instantly conjured up the court-room scene. The raven was the judge, and the parrots were the jury. He could almost see a pair of spectacles on the raven's black beak—almost see the parrots turning to corpulent, nodding jurors before his eyes.

All at once the sudden opening of a door, on the other side of the room, brought him out of his trance. He started, looked up, and saw a very beautiful old lady approaching. He first thought that she was old because of her snow-white hair; but as she drew nearer he realised that he must be mistaken. Those plump, pink cheeks were unwrinkled; those



Scene from the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production "The Unholy Three," starring
Lon Chaney.

large, luminous eyes, now peering at him so kindly, were still full of the fire of life.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she asked in a peculiarly musical voice, and, with a nervous gesture, placed one hand over her lips.

"I want to see some of your parrots," began Hector. "I'd like to hear them talk. I was thinking of buying—"

But before he could finish, a deep guttural voice drowned him out. "I don't like that young man," it said slowly and distinctly; "I don't like that young man."

Hector McDonald wheeled about as though he were on springs. So lifelike was the tone, so clear the enunciation, that he thought a man must have entered. But there was no one there; and he found himself staring stupidly through the gilded bars of a cage into the fierce, yellow eyes of a parrot.

But hardly had he turned, hardly had he realised his mistake, before another voice—a shrill female voice—cried out: "His teeth are shiny, his eyes are shiny; and they've taken all the light from his soul."

Again Hector turned in astonishment, and again his eyes encountered the fixed gaze of another parrot.

But before he realised this, before he could steady his reeling brain, a third voice broke the stillness—the thin, quavering voice of age. “I am old,” it said fretfully,—“very old! I have tasted blood; I have seen death; and he, who steals my sleep away from me, is cursed in the eyes of God.”

This time Hector saw the bird that spoke, and, as it were, caught it in the act of speaking. It was very dingy-looking—this parrot—and it bit at its bars wrathfully, peering at the young man through half-closed eyes.

“Do not judge him too hastily, my brothers!” cried a commanding voice behind McDonald, a peremptory voice which made him whirl about on his heels. “He is young,” continued the voice, “and the hot blood of youth shall be forgiven.”

“Amen,” said a childish voice in a corner.

“Judge not lest ye be judged,” said the raven, for it was he who had spoken like an oracle; and, ruffling his plumage, with a haughty tilt to his beak, he turned about on his perch, presenting his back to the company.

Then there followed a disconcerting silence. Hector McDonald felt that his brain was revolving like some kind of huge pin-wheel. He seized his

head with both hands as if he were trying to hold it stationary on his shoulders; while between dry lips he gasped out, more to himself than to the old lady: "This isn't possible, you know—this really isn't possible!"

"Oh, yes it is, sir," she said, evidently enjoying his amazement. "Yes, it is. Don't mind them. They're my birds, sir—my darling birds."

"Birds!" cried Hector, indicating the cages by a wave of his hand. "They may be *devils* but they're not birds."

"Oh, but they are, sir!" cried the old lady. "And such well-taught birds you won't find in the whole city. They're mostly old ones; and what knowledge they do have stored away in their heads! It's quite remarkable!"

"Yes, *remarkable* is the word," said the young man, still unconvinced, giving the row of cages a suspicious look. "But will you tell me how they carry on a conversation like that?"

"That comes from years and years of teachin'," said the old lady. "Some of these birds are awful old. My father owned all those that spoke just now. He taught them to go on like that when anybody

came into the store. He kept them to cause a sensation, as he said."

"And he succeeded," said Hector, beginning to regain his self-composure. "But how did he get them to speak, one after the other like that?"

"Oh, it took years and years. They do it by sequence of sound, sir. You see one starts; and the next one knows by the sound when *his* time has come around. But it took an awful long time, sir."

"I can believe it. I never heard anything like it before. I wouldn't think it possible, if I hadn't heard it with my own ears. Of course you won't sell *these* birds, but have you any others that can talk well? I want to buy one for a little boy."

"Oh, yes," said the old lady, smiling delightedly. "I can make every parrot in the place talk to you. They're all proficient talkers, sir."

"Then will you please show me a few examples?"

"Well," said the old lady thoughtfully, "there are two birds that I recommend. One I call the 'Philosopher' and the other the 'Pirate.' You shall hear them both, and choose."

"Fine!" cried Hector enthusiastically, "fine! Let's hear the Philosopher first. Perhaps he's a feathered Schopenhauer."

"I don't know *him*," replied the old lady, "but this bird is very old and very wise. He knew almost as much fifty years ago, when father bought him. But you'll be able to judge for yourself. He's over here, sir. Come this way."

Hector McDonald followed the old lady into a corner of the little store, a corner veiled by the shadow of several packing-boxes; and here—shrouded as it were in mystery—hung a rusty old cage, grey with dust and cobwebs. By straining his eyes to the utmost, the young man could just make out through the bars of the dungeon the large, solemn eyes and black, projecting beak of the prisoner within.

"He *does* look like a philosophic old bird," said Hector. "Why is he shut off from the world by these packing-boxes? Does he like to be as solitary as this?"

"Like it?" cried the old lady, "like it? Why, he just dotes on it! I used to think, like you, that maybe he was lonely here; and I moved him over with the others. Well, you ought to have heard the noises he made. How he cursed and swore at them! It was awful! All day long, he was at it. The Pirate is rough and ready with his tongue, but he can't say

near the mean and spiteful things this old bird can —things that cut you like a knife."

"I suppose he hurt their feelings?"

"Now you're joking," said the old lady, giving him a quick look. "But you're wrong there, sir, because parrots *do* have feelings. I live with them, and I should know."

Evidently this old woman was a little mad, thought Hector. It would be better to humour her a bit. "Why do you keep this cage so dirty?" he asked. "The rest are clean enough."

"He can't stand having his cage dusted. He likes it covered with cobwebs most. If ever I come near him with a duster, he carries on like a bad one. I guess the dirt and cobwebs fit in with his thinking. He's a gloomy old bird."

"Well, let's hear him talk," said Hector.

The old lady put her hand in the pocket of her gingham apron and brought it out filled with sunflower seeds. These she pushed through the bars as an offering to the philosopher within. "Hush!" she whispered, with a finger to her lips. "You'll hear him speak directly."

Listening with strained attention, Hector heard a crackling noise—evidently a sunflower seed be-

ing crushed between rapacious jaws—and then a voice, deep, hollow, awe-inspiring, issued from the gloomy recesses of the cage.

"I am old, sad, and weary," said the voice. "Knowledge I have; and I curse it because it makes me sad. Every new thought is a thorn in my crown. The fools fly about in the sunshine rejoicing, because they *are* fools. Wisdom is the dregs at the bottom of the cup; folly, the happy foam crowning the glass. This foam is composed of bubbles—love, ambition, hope. Soon it fades away. Love is lust; ambition, famishing ego; hope, a will-o'-the-wisp. I knew that, years ago. Some do not taste the dregs of wisdom—they die praising God. He is the great egotist—He made all mankind in His image. If He had had six arms and six legs, *you* might be able to accomplish more. The worms are our fondest friends—they remain with us even after we are cold to them. I have thought a lot in my day, but now I must sleep."

The solemn voice died away.

Then for the second time that evening, McDonald was struck dumb with amazement; for the second time that evening he experienced the cold fear of a person on the verge of insanity—the fear that he could no longer trust his faculties. Surely it was

impossible that parrots could talk as these parrots had talked. If any one had told him so he would have laughed at that person; and yet here he was, face to face with the evident truth.

All at once he grew hot with anger; the anger that a brave man experiences, encountering something supernatural—something beyond the scope of human intelligence. These were not parrots, but other things dressed up to look like parrots—was his extremely hazy thought. With the desperation of a doomed soul, he stuck his finger through the bars of the cage and prodded the gloomy captive in the breast. There came a loud flapping of wings, a guttural scream, and something hard and sharp bit his finger to the bone.

McDonald drew back his hand with a muttered curse and regarded with calmness the blood dripping from it. His mental equilibrium had returned. "It's a parrot," he said in a relieved voice. "There's no dodging the fact that it's a parrot."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried the old lady—"so sorry! All the beautiful blood is flowing out, and dropping to the floor like rubies. They will be lost, all lost. Come with me quickly; I'll tie it up for you." She took the young man by the arm.

Hector McDonald followed this strange old woman through the open door at the rear of the shop—followed her dazedly, as a little child follows its mother. She conducted him to a tiny room back of the store—a tiny room with bare, white walls and a hard-wood floor, which reflected the ruddy light from the open fireplace. In one corner, beside the window, was a wicker baby-carriage; and in it, a little sleeping form could be seen outlined through its covering. The place was homelike, from the rocking-chair and sofa to the grandfather clock harmoniously ticking out the seconds.

The old lady led Hector to a wash-basin near the baby-carriage. Soon she had his wounded finger beneath the faucet, and in a moment more was bandaging it neatly with a piece of snowy linen she had taken from her work-box on the table.

"How does it feel?" she asked at length, with solicitude mirrored on her face. "I hope it doesn't pain you, sir?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Hector, coming out of his mental stupor—"nothing at all. I'm sorry to have put you to this bother, though. Is that your baby, Mrs——?"

"Blake's the name, sir," she answered with an

imperceptible start, "Mrs. Irene Blake. Yes, I suppose it's mine now, since its poor mother died—my sister who was."

"It's a beautiful baby," said Hector without the slightest idea of whether he were stating a fact or not—"quite a remarkably fine baby!"

"Yes, it *is* pretty," said the old lady, flushing with pleasure. "But if you're ready, sir; we'll go back and I'll show you the 'Pirate'."

"Is he as bloodthirsty as the 'Philosopher'?" asked Hector as he followed her into the shop. "You know I want a parrot for a *little boy*."

"Oh, he's as gentle as a lamb," said the old lady over her shoulder. "But his talk isn't. He's blood-thirsty with his tongue, that's all. His bark is worse than his bite."

"I was hoping that he didn't have a bite," said McDonald, glancing ruefully at his bound finger.

"Of course you don't want to prod him—parrots don't like that. It goes against their pride; and they're the proudest birds that fly."

"I'll be careful not to," said the young man.

By now they were standing before another cage, that, like the Philosopher's, was hung a little apart from the others. Hector, at a glance, realised that its

inmate had a far different temperament from the feathered Schopenhauer's. Evidently this bird was more for action and less for thought. McDonald could see it moving quickly from one end of its cage to the other, pecking at the bars with its beak, climbing up and down, turning awkward somersaults, and in all ways showing a restless energy quite foreign to the gloomy bird behind the packing-boxes. Even as he spoke, the "Pirate" continued his violent revolutions—speaking either right side up or upside-down as the case might be.

"You mustn't mind him," said the old lady. "He can't keep still a minute. I believe he even walks in his sleep, which means a bad conscience. But he can't help it, poor thing. Now Pirate, let's hear your story." Again she whispered "Ssh!" and put her finger to her lips.

Then, to Hector's amazement, the "Pirate," in a quavering seafaring voice, launched out into singing verse:

"It was when I sailed with Bloody Mike
On the Caribbean Sea ;
The night I seen, with groan and scream,
Blood washin' to yer knee.
The merchantman we laid aboard,

Puttin' the crew beneath the sword;
And callin' on the name of Gawd—
 Won't never wash us clean.

"Ahoy! Ahoy! Bully, my boy,
 There's a vessel on our lee!
Devils in Hell! see how her swell
 Shakes across the sea!
So up with yer dirk betwixt yer teeth
 And throw away the old black sheath,
For there's gold, in her hold, for the bold,
 Bully, boy!"

"How's that?" cried the old lady, when the "Pirate" had finished. "Real poetry like you read out of a book. And that isn't all he knows. Listen to this: "How do you like it here, Pirate?"

"Hell!" said the parrot, turning a back somersault. "Hell!—give us a mug o' grog!"

"They tell me you're not as wicked as you used to be, Pirate?" said the old lady.

"Me?" cried the bird, biting savagely at his perch, "Me? Why, damn their eyes, I'm wickeder than I ever was!"

"That's enough," cried Hector, whose brain was beginning to revolve again "—that's quite enough! I don't want to hear the story of his life. Just a few amusing anecdotes are sufficient. When he meets

Tommy, he can be more communicative. What do you want for this bird Mrs. Blake?"

"Well," said the old lady thoughtfully, "let me see. Of course the Pirate is an accomplished bird; but still he's a disturbing influence in the store—he gives the young parrots bad ideas. I tell you what—I'll let you have him for fifty dollars."

"Done!" cried Hector. "I'll take him, Mrs. Blake." Pulling out his pocket-book, with the unworldliness characteristic of him, he drew from its sadly depleted contents a fifty-dollar bill and presented it to the old lady.

She hesitated a moment before putting it in her pocket. "There's just one thing more," she said; "I always like to know where my parrots are going—what kind of a home they'll get. The Pirate is an old friend of mine—even if he is a trifle coarse at times—and I wish him well in life."

"He's going to Mr. Arlington's house on Fifth Avenue. I'm giving this bird to his grandson, Tommy. I wish you'd send it in the morning."

"Oh, he's going to Mr. Arlington's, is he?" said the old lady thoughtfully. "I'm afraid the Pirate will be tempted by all that wealth around him. Well, I'll send him over to-morrow morning by Cousin

Harry. Will you write the address on this card, please?"

As Hector bent over the counter with a pencil in his hand, a childish cry of lament came through the half-open door of the room behind the store. "It's the baby crying!" said the old lady, starting nervously. "I must go and see what he wants. Excuse me just a moment, sir." She hurried out.

When she returned, Hector handed her the card and started taking his departure with a last look about him at the room where he had experienced such strange sensations. "I never thought to see parrots so well trained as yours, Mrs. Blake," he said.

"I'm so glad you're pleased with them," said the old lady, smiling at him in her motherly fashion. "Do drop in again. If you're interested, I can show you many other strange birds. Besides, I'd like to have you see the baby when he's awake. Will you come again?"

"I certainly will," said Hector with conviction. "I don't remember when I've passed such an exciting hour. You may expect me soon, Mrs. Blake."

As Hector hurried home on that never-to-be-forgotten evening, bright anticipation of the joy on

Tommy's face and the horror on his mother's, when the piratical parrot should appear, filled his heart with gladness. Never once did he realise that this gift had placed him many days nearer to the bread-line. It was this young man's worldly custom never to think of the necessities of life.

"What a wise old chap Shakespeare was!" he muttered, looking up at the moon which was at that moment peering over the ragged roof-tops. "What a wise old chap he was when he wrote: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, O Horatio, than are dreamed of in our philosophy!' Yes, there's lots of truth in that."

With what surety of conviction would Hector have said this, if, by any chance, like the moon at that moment, he could have looked into the little back room of the bird-store—that neat little room with the bare white walls and polished floor reflecting the calm firelight in a pale yellow pool at the beautiful old lady's feet.

CHAPTER IX

MR. ARLINGTON had finished his breakfast. Taking up the morning paper, he went into ambush behind it—darting out from time to time to catch some unlucky member of his household in a natural word or gesture, and quelling them with a stony stare. When he was about, his thin, anæmic wife and widowed, elder daughter were as wax dolls; only Dorothy now and then asserted herself.

And because of this, the girl was the idol of the old man's heart. He loved to bully her to the point where she would flare up into righteous anger—the point beyond which even *he* dared not go. The others were spiritless. He had quelled them so easily because they had never had the true Arlington blood in them—the fighting blood that had placed him where he was. He knew that Dorothy had inherited it—all that fiery strength that had pulsed in his grandfather, in his father, and in himself—the strength that had made his name a powerful one in the city. And after he had had a scene with his younger daughter, after he had bullied her

to the point beyond which he was afraid to go, he would drive down to the office—happy, jubilant. “Dot’s a true Arlington,” he would mutter to himself, rubbing his hands together, “—a true Arlington. Why, she’s not afraid of anything—not even of me.” All of which goes to prove that this old financier—like most successful men—was something of an egotist, something of a bully, and something of a father.

Now the bully was the most in evidence. His large, florid face hidden behind the paper, he seemed reading intently; but in reality his ears were pricked to hear the conversation, his small twinkling blue eyes were ready at any moment to peer around the corner of the sheet, his big baritone voice was loaded and waiting—like a cannon—to silence the musketry of his family’s whispered words. The tyrant of the household, he could not have been more terrible to his wife, elder daughter and grandson, if he had had thunderbolts in either hand and lightning in his glance.

Suddenly, at some guarded word of Dorothy’s, the old man’s attentive ears caught the pretext they had been waiting for. The paper was lowered from his face—like the unveiling of a statue—revealing

the massive jaw, the broad forehead, the two indentations between the eyes.

"What did you say, Dot? *Who* was here yesterday?"

The girl hesitated for a moment. "Why, Hector McDonald," she said at last.

"Hector McDonald?" repeated Mr. Arlington, darting suspicious glances at his younger daughter, "Hector McDonald? That's the young man I don't like, isn't it?"

"Yes, you never did like him," said Dorothy with spirit. "But that doesn't say I don't."

"You must like whom I like," said Arlington, drawing his bushy eyebrows together over his nose. "This Hector McDonald is a fool. Why, I know his uncle; and he told me about him. Wants to write poetry, or something of the sort!"

"Well, what of it?" cried Dorothy, turning red. "What if he *does* write poetry?"

"Only this," continued the old man, pounding the table with his fist to add emphasis to his words, "only this, Dorothy: I'll have no poets snivelling around this house. There are enough petticoats here without him. A girl of your spirit—an Arlington!—having such a weak-kneed whipper-snapper hang-

ing around! I'm ashamed of you, Dorothy! Why, I offered him a position in my office!—wanted to see what kind of stuff he had in him. Work? Not he! He'd rather sit on a bench in the park and write verses to the nursemaids. He——”

But Dorothy was on her feet—her face flaming—her hands tightly clenched. Glancing at her, Arlington realised that he had finally overstepped the invisible line. For the first time he felt a flicker of fear.

“Father!” cried the girl. “Father! I won’t——”

At that moment the butler appeared in the doorway, holding at arm's length a large, round object tied up in white tissue-paper. The family scene between father and daughter was for the time being averted.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the servant with a face as expressionless as the face of a snow-man, “but this 'ere is left for Master Tom.”

“For Master Tom, William?” asked Arlington. “What is it? Who left it?”

“I don't know, sir, h'exactiy; but I thinks there's some kind of h'animal in this, Mr. Arlington. Leastways I can 'ear it move now and then, sir.”

“But who brought it, William?”

"I don't know the man, sir. I never seen 'im before. But I'd know 'im fast enough, if h'ever I lays eyes on 'im again. It was the size of 'im that struck me. When I opens the door I says to meself: 'Good Lord! this ain't a man!' says I; 'it's a bloomin' giant h'out of a story-book!'"

"That will do, William," said Mr. Arlington sternly. "Put it down on the chair there."

The butler obeyed his master in silence, only shaking his head slowly from side to side in dumb testimony of the astonishing size of the man who had delivered the bundle. "'It's most h'amazin'!" he mumbled to himself, as the pantry-door shut behind him, "—most h'amazin'!"

Mr. Arlington fixed his grandson with a look, freezing that squirming, curious infant into dumb immobility; then, rising slowly to his feet, he approached the bundle and surveyed it suspiciously. All watched with breathless interest; and Tommy, as soon as his ferocious grandfather's back was turned, began to wiggle plaintively, like a fish out of water. A pink cord held the tissue paper in place. This the old man broke between his thick, powerful fingers. Unwrapping the covering, he disclosed to their view a large, shining bird-cage.

"Oh!" cried the child, quite carried away by wonder and delight, "Oh! it's the parrot Uncle Hector said he'd bring me!"

For a moment all eyes were fixed on the cage and its restless inmate, the piratical parrot, that, true to habit, still continued its everlasting acrobatics without giving so much as a look to the outer world.

"A parrot!" said Arlington at last, in a disgusted tone. "Who did you say gave it to you, Tommy?"

"Uncle Hector," answered the child promptly, quite oblivious to the warning frowns of both mother and aunt.

"Uncle Hector!" growled the old man, glowering at Dorothy. "Who told you to call that puppy 'Uncle Hector'?"

"I did," said his younger daughter in no uncertain tone of voice. Again danger signals flamed in her cheeks.

"And I suppose you'll be teaching the child to call the butler 'Uncle Will,' and the washwoman 'Aunt Susie'! 'Uncle Hector!'—I'll Hector him!"

"That seems to be one of your traits, father. But with some people it isn't possible or profitable." Rising from the table, Dorothy turned and walked

out of the room, leaving Arlington, as usual, in a state of jubilant satisfaction.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "that's one she scored off the old man! Called me a bully right to my face! *There's* spirit for you!" But aloud he called after her: "We'll be receiving stolen goods if we keep that parrot. He must have taken it out of the store when the man wasn't looking. Where would he get the money to buy parrots? He's a pauper since his uncle turned him out—a miserable pauper!"

Dorothy did not answer. She hurried up the stairs, biting her lips to hold the tears in check until she should reach the privacy of her own room. But Tommy, with a strange solemnity on his round face, began to defend his friend and benefactor.

"I know where Uncle Hector got the parrot, Granpa," said the child. "He went to Africa, and grabbed it by the tail!"

"He told you that?" said the old man, approaching his grandson and standing over him truculently. "He told you that because he's a liar."

"Oh, John!" cried Mrs. Arlington in a voice like an echo, "the child is only a child, you know."

"I didn't think he was a gorilla, Mrs. Arlington," retorted her energetic spouse. "But because he *is* a

child, that's no reason why he should be lied to. I'm tired of having children lied to in this house; and I won't put up with it any longer. Grace"— and he pointed at his quailing elder daughter with a fateful finger—"Grace was lied to when she was a child; and look at her now. You were lied to when you were a child; and look at you now. No, this practice of lying to children has got to be stopped. Why, I shouldn't be surprised if one of you has told this poor, misguided boy that there is a Santa Claus—Has anybody told you that there is a Santa Claus, Tommy?"

"Oh, yes, Granpa! Mother and Aunty and Grandma says they is a Santa Claus what comes to good little boys with toys and——"

"Ah!—I knew it!" cried Mr. Arlington in triumph, enjoying himself immensely—"I knew it! In spite of my orders, you've been lying to this child. You've founded his life on lies. When he goes to bed he's afraid of the dark, because you've lied to him about goblins and fairies. When he does anything he shouldn't, he's afraid Santa Claus won't visit him. Tell me, Tommy, what are you afraid of most? Some lie that your fond mother, aunt, or grandmother has told you, I'll wager my hat. Come,

speak up, my little man—what are you afraid of most?"

"I'm afraid of *you* most, Granpa," said the child.

The old man started; and it seemed to him that he was standing over the Dorothy of other days. As a child, she would have answered thus. "Well, I was wrong," he muttered, "for I'm a fact and not a fancy. Some people might call me a brutal fact."

"Are you, Granpa?" asked the child.

Again Arlington started. "Certainly, Tommy—certainly," he answered; and yet through his brain a flock of strange thoughts were flying about on restless wings. Perhaps the lie about Santa Claus, Tommy could believe—the lies about the parrot, the goblins, and the fairies—yes; but the lie that seemed the most real, the most overwhelming, the most terrible, was the lie that he, the grandfather, had lived all his life. And then it seemed absurd to the old man to lecture his wife and daughters—as laughably absurd as a house-breaker judging pick-pockets. He was ordering them not to do something that *he* did every day—was doing at that very moment. For every time he shook his finger at the child—every time he frowned at him—he was lying to his grandson; for these gestures—these frowns—

were the reflection of nothing within himself. They were merely lies—and nothing but lies. Arlington was too good an actor not to enjoy his part; and so, shaking himself mentally, he began to act again.

"Now, Tommy," he continued, "Santa Claus is a lie; so don't believe in him. Uncle Hector is a lie, for he's no relation of yours—and I'll take good care that he never is. Nearly everything that anybody tells you is a lie. *However*, I will tell you the absolute truth. That parrot—and it's the most ordinary looking parrot I ever saw—came from some bird-store in the city. Probably it was stolen. As this Hector McDonald will soon be, so now is this parrot: its plumage is shabby—it looks poverty-stricken. Now I will give you a truthful prophecy. Some morning that bird will begin to scream and——"

"Uncle Hector said he would bring me one what would talk and swear bootiful."

"Lies—all lies! However he may scream, as I say. He'll wake me up early in the morning just once, and then——"

"Then?" repeated the child, looking up at his grandfather with great startled eyes.

"Then, Tommy," continued the old man, grin-

ning ghoulishly at the infant and seizing his napkin in a powerful hand “—then I will creep up to his cage—so!—and take him by the neck—thus!—and twist, and twist, like I’m twisting this napkin, see? —till snap goes his neck!—and then no more parrot! Perhaps if you’re a good boy, after he’s dead I’ll have him stuffed for you. How would you like that, Tommy?”

The child, who had been watching his grandfather with dilated eyes and pallid face, at this vivid climax to the old man’s prophecy, burst into violent weeping. “Oh, don’t let Granpa hurt my parrot!” he cried, throwing himself into his mother’s arms—“I don’t want him stuffed and dead! I wants him livin’ and swearin’. Don’t let him touch my parrot, Mother!”

“A lot she can help you!” growled Arlington. “If it crosses my mind to wring its neck—at any time, day or night—I’ll go and do it.”

Realising that he had reached his climax, that now was the time to make an artistic exit, the old man hurried from the room and in a few minutes more was being whirled down to his office in a very pleasant state of mind. Meanwhile Tommy sobbed on his mother’s kind but spiritless bosom, while his

grandmother whispered weak words of comfort into his ear.

"If he wrings your parrot's neck, dear," she said—and there was no doubt in the poor, misguided lady's mind that her husband was quite capable of committing such a crime—"if he wrings its neck, Tommy dear, I will buy you another."

"I don't want annozer; I want him," said Tommy through his tears; and, hearing the front door shut behind the tyrant's back, his crying redoubled.

It was at this moment that Dorothy entered the room and proceeded to quiet her nephew. "Of course not, Tommy," she said. "Why, I wouldn't allow such a thing for a minute! Just let him try—I'd like to see him!"

And the child, sensing the dormant strength in his aunt's character, deserted his mother's lap for Dorothy's and nestled in her arms, looking up into her face trustfully.

"You're not afraid of Granpa, Aunt Dorothy?"

"No," answered Dorothy. "But I think he's a little bit afraid of me."

"And you won't let Granpa hurt my parrot, Aunt Dorothy?"

"No, dear."

But the parrot, all this time, seems very ill at ease—climbing up and down the gilded bars, turning, twisting, now upside down, now right side up, always restless, nervous, as though filled with great anxiety. He is like the prisoner who has heard his sentence read and who knows that execution awaits him on the morrow; for no matter how daring this prisoner may be, fear now looks through his eyes and drives him about his cell, increasing the store of nervous energy that leaves with passing life. So it is with the piratical parrot—he has heard his death sentence from Mr. Arlington's lips, and is now a pitiful object to behold.

What has become of that seafaring voice, those hearty curses, those bloodthirsty songs? Why, the poor bird is stricken speechless from fear—not a single word escapes that trembling, lowered beak. In vain do they gather around him—in vain do they seek to dispel his gloom with “Pretty Poll” and crackers. It is true that he eats, though in other respects he is but the grey ghost of a parrot—a forlorn feathered ghost that has left its voice behind it in the grave.

CHAPTER X

HECTOR McDONALD stood at the window, looking out on Thirty-fourth Street. It was a hot, sultry day in August. The city seemed to be bubbling, like a huge cauldron, beneath the rays of a burning sun. And every sound—the rumbling of heavy wheels, the jolting of the street-cars over the tracks, the insistent cries of newsboys—rose to him accentuated in volume, shrill and fretful as the voice of haggling old age.

Beneath him, on the pavement, a dingy crowd was passing—a crowd with wilted collars and drooping plumes. They plodded on with downcast eyes, like a drove of driven beasts. Some moved their lips as they walked, like somnambulists living in a dream; some, flourishing their rolled up newspapers threateningly, hurried past with fixed frowns on their perspiring foreheads; some strolled by leisurely, stopping every now and then before a shop-window with the air of people who are in search of something. And, in the middle of the street, trolley-cars whined and muttered; truck-drivers swore at

the broad backs of their horses; automobiles flowed steadily and monotonously with an occasional peremptory "honk." Everything was seething with hot, tormenting life. And one felt, on looking down, that New York was only a woman after all—a giantess whose nerves were giving way.

McDonald had taken up these quarters the day after he left his uncle's house; a single room immediately above a dentist's office—small, poorly furnished, and cheap. It had two dusty windows commanding a view of the street, a closet, two worn-out chairs, a bureau with a cracked mirror, and a picture of cattle grazing in a field.

When he had first moved in, the young man had been attracted to the place because of its shabbiness, its cheerlessness, its dissimilarity to his own room at home. He had read of geniuses who lived in garrets—geniuses who in time had startled the world. A garret seemed the natural background to any literary success. And even the groans and laments, ascending from the office of the dentist, had added a certain zest and piquancy to life. Listening to them, as he had typed his sinister mystery stories, stimulated his imagination—they even wove themselves into the plots.

He had enjoyed the novelty of this new life at first, but had soon grown tired of it. As the weeks had passed, the room began to oppress him. It seemed to be growing smaller day by day. It was almost as though the ceiling were descending, as though the walls were drawing in. And the furniture seemed literally to be falling to pieces. A leg had come off the bureau; now the springs of the bed were giving way. At night, when he tried to sleep, it was as though some one had suddenly pumped all the air out of the room—it became difficult to breathe. And he would sit up, gasping the warm fetid breath of the city into his lungs. At these times, how he longed for the country! He would picture Mr. Graham's place on the Sound—its cool refreshing breezes, its tall swaying trees, its green shadowy lawn. And thinking of what he had lost, he would feel a great hatred for his uncle.

At first he had enjoyed this new life as though it were a game—a game called Poverty. He had played it like a child—delighting in the poorly cooked food of the Bohemian restaurants, in the foreigners one saw deftly eating macaroni, in the ceaseless chatter of alien tongues. That Polish Jew sitting in one corner—the Jew with the long black beard and

glittering eyes—had been to him a Svengali; that Frenchman with the broad expanse of forehead, mumbling to himself, might very well have been another Claude Lantier. Giving his imagination full sway, he had enjoyed it all. But alas, the game had lost its charm. The stern God of Facts had ruthlessly destroyed his air-castles one by one. These Bohemian restaurants—which he had imagined to be peopled with writers, artists, musicians—dwindled into dirty little cafés where one could get poor food, poorly cooked, at a very low price; and their denizens, riff-raff who seldom washed themselves and who devoured their victuals in a disgusting fashion.

But these were not the worst of McDonald's troubles. In comparison with his rejected manuscripts, they seemed trifling. During all this time, not one of his many stories had been accepted. And this seemed incomprehensible to the young man. He had worked so conscientiously on them; he had toiled each day to make them as perfect as he could; he had sent them out so confidently; and then —ah, then they had been returned. What was the reason for it? Surely they were as good as those he read in the magazines. But perhaps Uncle Tobias

was right—perhaps *he* was a self-deluded fool. And at this thought, Hector would grind his teeth in impotent despair.

Of late he had been very lonely. The Arlingtons had gone away for the summer; and, with the exception of the acquaintances whom he chanced to meet, there had been no one to talk to, no one to cheer him up. The single bright spot in his horizon was the bird-store. Since his first visit, the young man had gone there many times, attracted thither by the proficiency of the parrots, the oddities of the old lady, and by the interest he took in the baby.

McDonald was a great lover of children; and this one had a certain owlish solemnity of face, a certain dreamy depth of eye, certain evenness of disposition, that attracted him. He had nick-named the baby "The Silent One"; and was wont to chaff the kind old lady on the fact that, although her birds were like so many old-maids for gossip, her tiny nephew was usually as dumb as a stone image. Sometimes, driven to desperation by the child's silence, Hector would contrive ways and means to make it speak. He would offer it a penny to hear it say "Thank you"; and, if this failed, he would go to the other extreme. When the old lady's back was

turned, he would rumple its hair and blow cigarette smoke in its face. This second course of action usually made the baby's black eyes light up with passion for a moment; but his pent-up emotions never broke out in a wail of "Aunty, Aunty," or anything of the sort. No, he accepted everything—pennies, hair-rumpling, and cigarette smoke—in the same sombre, stolid silence—a silence which provoked even while it interested the young man.

McDonald turned his back on the window, and, walking over to the bureau, stared dejectedly at the pile of manuscripts lying on it. Six short stories rested here, unhonoured and unsung—the work of as many weeks—the poor dead children of his brain. With what bright hopes had he sent them out into the world, and with what bitterness and sorrow did he find them home again. And yet, with the foolish fondness of a loving father, he did not blame them for their failure. No, rather did he blame those cold-hearted manuscript monarchs—the editors—who held the power of life or death in their careless hands. Why had they dealt so unfairly, so cruelly, so harshly, with these, his children? Perhaps they had judged them without a hearing; perhaps

they had sent them back without turning the pages? Yes, it must be that.

The young man ran his hand across his forehead with a weary gesture. Many days of constant work and confinement had taken a certain amount of youthful buoyancy from him. Despondency was a new acquaintance, and he felt that he must rid himself of this unwelcome guest. Of late it had peered over his shoulder, even guided his hand as he wrote, and in consequence his work had become more unsuited to the public's demands. In spite of himself, he had begun to look into the face of To-morrow; and for the first time in his life he had found Her thin, emaciated, with hunger-haunted eyes. His money was going fast; and what was worse, under the load of continual disappointment and prolonged mental labour, his courage was going fast. Even now, half unconsciously, he pulled out of his pocket a thin roll of bills and began to count them, slowly, cautiously, yet eagerly.

"Ten dollars left," he said to himself,—"only ten! I'll make it last me two weeks."

"And then?" whispered Despondency.

"Why then my clothes—they should bring me something."

"And then?" repeated the relentless shadow.

"Oh, Hell!" the young man burst out suddenly—apostrophising the grim spectre at his elbow—"Oh, Hell! go away will you! Don't bother me any more. My luck's bound to change; and there's lots of time yet—lots. Meanwhile, I'll take a walk and lose you."

McDonald picked up his hat and coat and hurried from the room. As he descended the creaking stairs, he whistled gaily, challengingly; and when he shut the front door behind him, it was with unnecessary violence—as though he were slamming it in the face of an enemy.

Soon he was mingling with the bustling throng. Turning up Fifth Avenue, he walked rapidly for several blocks, and, in spite of the heat, began to feel a little more like his old self. As he was passing Tilton's, he saw a necktie in the window which caught his fancy. Coming to an abrupt halt, he surveyed it for some time with a look of longing. In his days of affluence he would have walked in and purchased it. Unfortunately, those days were past.

As he stood there, feasting his eyes on this display of haberdashery, a hand fell on his arm. Wheeling about, he came face to face with his uncle.

The old gentleman looked especially well. His eyes were clear and bright. His complexion was bronzed by a summer spent near the water. He had put on flesh and had that air of affluent well-being which comes from good clothes, good food, and a large bank account.

At sight of him, McDonald felt a hot wave of blood surge up into his head. While he had been starving, his uncle had been feasting; while he had been forced to go without the necessities of life, his uncle had been wallowing in them. Now no doubt, this old tyrant had sought him out to poke fun at him.

Mr. Graham smiled rather superciliously at his nephew. "You don't look very prosperous, Hector," he said. "I expect you've had enough of writing by this time?"

And then McDonald, with all the bitterness of the months seething within him, looked his uncle straight in the eye and said coldly: "Good-afternoon, sir." In a moment more, the young man had vanished in the crowd.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. BLAKE sat in the little back room of the bird-store. She was knitting a huge woollen sock, rather slowly and awkwardly. Beside her chair was the wicker baby-carriage; and in it, sitting bolt upright, was the child who had been sleeping on Hector's first visit to the shop.

On this afternoon there was a newcomer beside the fireplace,—none other than “Cousin Harry”—a gigantic young man who, even in a sitting position, seemed to take up more than his allotted space in the small room. He sat reading the newspaper, bending forward in his chair, his huge, bristling chin resting in the hollow of a tremendous palm. From time to time, his dull brown eyes wandered to the blazing logs with a complete lack of speculation in their depths.

The old lady's head was bent over her knitting. She seemed engrossed in it, in spite of her laboriously slow movements, and only glanced up now and then at her tiny nephew. On these occasions, the child returned her look with a certain solemnity of

expression which seemed to grate on his aunt's nerves, for she would drop a stitch or two and have to unravel a little way. Finally she muttered something under her breath; and, shaking her head till her white curls rustled like the petals of a pale flower, she threw the sock on the floor and put her foot on it.

"I've started too late!" she cried. "It's no use! I can't learn! I don't care whether people expect it or not! I *won't* learn—that's all!"

For a moment there was a dead silence in the room. The gigantic "Cousin Harry" was engrossed in his paper; the child stared solemnly and silently at his aunt; and the old lady's eyes wandered here, there, and everywhere. Finally Mrs. Blake, with a sigh, reached down and picked up the discarded sock. Evidently ashamed of her outbreak of temper, she began to work again hurriedly, with many a sidelong look at the baby-carriage.

"Cousin Harry" broke the silence at last. Looking up from his paper, he tapped a certain paragraph with a great, blunt finger, and, turning his chair so that he faced aunt and nephew, spoke in a strange, rumbling voice which reminded one of a truck rolling over cobble-stones.

"Here's the article," said he. "Listen. This is New York's latest murder mystery."

The child's eyes left his aunt's face and became fixed on "Cousin Harry." There was an unhealthy interest mirrored on their black, shining surface that was strange in one so young. "Go on. Read it!" he piped.

"Yes," said the old lady, laying aside her knitting with alacrity. "Read it. Is it a good story?"

"MURDER OF E. S. GLOVER BAFFLES POLICE!"

"Mr. Glover's body was found this morning, lying on the floor of his conservatory, by the butler, Thomas Rorke. When the police arrived on the scene they examined the premises carefully without finding any apparent solution to the crime. At first it was thought that the murder had been committed in the library—which opens on the conservatory—and that the body had been dragged into the conservatory in an attempt to conceal it until morning. However, on examination of both rooms, this theory was discarded. The blood-stains, found beside the body, plainly showed that it was here that the unfortunate man lost his life. As further evidence, a small pane of glass had been broken directly above the murdered man—an aperture not large enough for a good sized monkey to get through—and evidently caused by the blow of the iron bar which killed Mr. Glover. On examination, Thomas Rorke testifies that before going to bed he closed and

locked all the doors and windows himself. How then did the assassin, or assassins, enter?

"The motive of the crime was apparent robbery. Mr. Glover's famous jewels—jewels well known about the city—had been stripped from the body, wrenched off the fingers, torn from the shirt bosom. Yet here is another puzzling fact: Why should Mr. Glover go out into his conservatory at that time of night? There were no lights and he could see neither his birds nor his plants. Besides, it was his custom never to——"

"Why," cried the old lady, clapping her hands together, "why it's the old gentleman who bought one of my parrots the other day!"

"And perhaps," broke in "Cousin Harry," grinning until he looked like an ogre out of a fairy tale, "perhaps your parrot called him out—perhaps he called him by name."

"Oh, no," said the lady, "he couldn't do that very well."

But all this seemed to affect the nerves of her little nephew, for suddenly, without the slightest warning, he burst out into a piercing wail. The old lady and "Cousin Harry" interchanged glances; but, before they could console the child, Hector McDonald's voice came to them from the shop:

"O Mrs. Blake, I've come to call on you and the parrots, but what's happened to 'The Silent One'?"

"He's all right, sir," cried the old lady cheerily. Just a touch of nerves. Nothing serious. Step right in, sir. Willie will be quiet in a moment."

No sooner had the young man entered the little back room, than the child ceased his howling as suddenly as though a cork had been wedged into his open mouth. And, dropping his tiny hands from his round, red face, his black shoe-button eyes stared at the newcomer with all their wonted sullen stolidity of expression.

"It's wonderful what an effect you have on that child!" continued the old lady. "When you're here, he's always good. He thinks a lot of you, sir—that's apparent. But I don't think you know 'Cousin Harry.' 'Cousin Harry,' this is Mr. McDonald who is kind enough to call on a lonely lady now and then."

Hector's eyes wandered to the giant beside the fireplace, who, like a mountain, at close proximity was almost too big to see. This was especially true when "Cousin Harry" was on his feet, as he was now, with one great hand extended and his mass of tangled hair brushing the cobwebs from the ceiling. McDonald examined the features of that huge face, one by one—the sleepy eyes, the bulbous nose, the

cavernous mouth—and yet the combination of them all, the expression, was lost on him. It was as though he were examining some gigantic waxen mask at a museum. He felt that he was too near it, and must retreat a dozen paces before he could appreciate the natural proportions. Looking up at the man before him, never in all his life had he felt half so weak and childlike. He extended a white, tentative hand; and it vanished—devoured in an instant by a brawny red fist.

"How are you?" stammered Hector, wincing as he felt "Cousin Harry's" viselike grip. "How are you? This is a pleasure."

"I'm very glad to meet you," growled the giant; and, as though to prove his assertion, he tightened his hold on McDonald's hand till the young man rose up on his toes from pain.

"Well, well," cried the old lady pleasantly, "now we're all friends. I'm glad you happened to drop in while 'Cousin Harry' was here. He's often said he wanted to meet you. You look surprised, Mr. McDonald; I guess you didn't expect to find 'Cousin Harry' so big; did you, sir? Most people don't."

"No," said Hector, "I didn't." He freed his hand from the giant's grasp—a hand that had turned red

and limp. "Nor so strong," he finished, regarding it ruefully.

"He *is* strong," said the old lady, "very strong! There are mighty few as strong as he. He's so strong, that sometimes he don't quite know how strong he is—which is unfortunate, sir."

"Yes, that *is* unfortunate."

"But with all his strength," continued the old lady proudly, "'Cousin Harry' is quite gentle too—especially with children. Why, do you know, I often let him take care of little Willie here. He's just as careful and kind to that child as any woman could be."

"You don't say so!" said McDonald politely.

"Yes, they're devoted—those two. To see that great man and that little child together—why, it almost brings the tears to my eyes. Such devotion! It's religious too. It reminds me of the lion lying down with the lamb."

"I see," said Hector. "But tell me, Mrs. Blake, how are all the parrots? Is the philosophic parrot with you yet?"

"No, Mr. McDonald, I sold him last week. Now here's a terrible thing that happened. 'Cousin Harry' was just reading it out of the newspaper. The gen-

tleman, we sold that parrot to, was a gentleman by the name of Glover; and last night he was murdered. It sort of brings the horribleness of a crime like that home—when you've seen and spoken to the gentleman that was murdered. He came in here just as hearty and pleasant last week; and now he's cold and dead. It kind of gives me the shivers, thinking of it!" Her white curls shook like silver tassels as she bent over her work.

"That is a coincidence, certainly," said the young man. "I read the case this morning. It seems as though somebody inside the house must have murdered him; and yet the broken pane in the conservatory gave me a clue. Of course it might have been broken by the blow that killed the old man, but then again it might——"

"What?" cried the old lady and "Cousin Harry" in a breath.

"Why," continued Hector carelessly, "it might have been broken from the outside so that the murderer could strike his victim without entering, or as a way of letting the thief in. Possibly it was used for both purposes."

"How's that?" growled "Cousin Harry" unpleasantly. "What do you mean by——"

"But, Mr. McDonald," broke in the old lady hurriedly, "how could the murderer know that Mr. Glover was going out into the conservatory that night? And how could a thief get through a hole that was scarcely big enough for a monkey to pass through?"

"Yes, that's so," said the young man. "And yet that phrase about the monkey gave me an idea. Perhaps it *was* a monkey that stole the jewels—a small monkey that had been trained to do it. You've seen the monkeys organ grinders have, that will hunt in your pockets for pennies? Well, then, why couldn't they be trained to steal jewels? It seems to me quite possible."

"Cousin Harry" burst into a roar of laughter which sounded like a dozen barrels rolling down hill; the old lady tittered faintly; and even "The Silent One" smiled, although his round black eyes were glittering unpleasantly.

"Haw! haw!" shouted the giant. "Haw! haw! a monkey! Do you hear that, Willie? A dirty, hairy little ape pulled off a job like this. No brains needed—just a dirty little ape, and an iron club!"

If Hector McDonald had been looking at "The Silent One" then, he would have been startled by

the strange, intense light in the child's eyes—the unwonted flush on the round cheeks—the trembling of the little hands. Perhaps he would have changed the topic of conversation, realising that murder was scarcely a subject to be discussed before babies. However, he did not notice these signs of nervous excitement, and continued rather irritably:

"Laugh if you want to, but there may be more truth in what I said than you think. If all crimes are to be solved by commonplace reasoning, the criminal genius will be as safe as the King of England. "I don't see anything impossible about the monkey idea."

Perhaps the old lady had noticed the unhealthy excitement of her little nephew, for at this point she changed the subject adroitly. "Speaking about clever criminals reminds me," said she: "Hows the 'Pirate' getting along these days?"

"Now that's one of the things I came to see you about," said Hector, forgetting his pique on the instant. "That parrot hasn't said a single word since he's been at the Arlingtons'. I've asked him to speak in identically the same words that you used; I've fed him sunflower seed—but all in vain. He's as silent as an imitation parrot."

"He must be grieving for me," said the old lady, shaking her head sadly. "That's the way with those birds when they're attached to any one. Sometimes they mourn for months. It takes time to heal their hearts. It's no use bothering him yet. It may be a week, and it may be a year, but when he *does* start talking you won't be able to stop him."

"It's been rather embarrassing," said Hector. "You see I've told the whole family such wonderful stories about that parrot, that I felt they only half believed me. Now, with the exception of Dorothy, they all think me a liar of the first water."

"Well, well," said the kind old lady soothingly, "it will come out all right in the end. Never you fear about that. Even if I have to visit the 'Pirate' myself and——"

"No, no, ma'm!" spoke up "Cousin Harry," staring stupidly at the fire. "That won't be necessary, ma'm—that won't be necessary. *You* visit the parrot, ma'm? Oh, no, ma'm—that won't be necessary."

But little Willie, "The Silent One," stared stonily at McDonald and said never a word.

CHAPTER XII

“Your eloquence I fain would seek.
Come, open wide your silent beak
And speak, Green Creature, speak, oh speak !”

IT WAS with these simple and extemporaneous lines that Hector McDonald, on the afternoon following his last visit to the bird-store, sought to break the piratical parrot’s magic spell of silence. He stood before the cage in an attitude of supplication; while Tommy’s toy dogs, toy cats, toy elephants, and especially his rocking-horse, regarded the young man coldly and superciliously. A child, who played the part of a man, they could understand; but a man, who played the part of a child, was indeed incomprehensible.

“I don’t believe he’ll ever speak!” cried Dorothy.
“He hasn’t said a single word since he’s been here.”

“I know, but you must give him a chance to get used to his surroundings.”

“He’s been here six months already, Hector.”

Mrs. Blake says that sometimes it takes a year before they feel at home. Mark my words: Some

day you'll come in and hear that parrot talking a blue streak. I imagine you'll have some trouble shutting him up again."

"I wish he *would* talk," said Dorothy, sighing. "Nobody in the house believes that he ever will. Your reputation for veracity depends upon it, Hector. The first thing father asks, when he comes home at night, is whether the parrot has said anything yet. He takes a positive delight in hearing that he hasn't. You see you told me such a lot about him, that——"

Hector turned away from the cage, and, crossing the room to where his fiancée sat by the nursery window, put his hand on her shoulder and looked down into her eyes. "Don't you believe me, Dorothy?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I do."

"Then you believe me when I say that that parrot can talk wonderfully—can even recite poetry?"

"Yes, I believe you, Hector."

"Well, that's all I care about. Some day he'll talk, but for the time being he's more for action. Look at him running around the cage as though the devil were after his tail-feathers. There's perpetual motion for you."

"He's always like that," said Dorothy. "Sometimes I think that if father came in and watched him for awhile, he'd invent something useful for him to do with all that wasted energy."

"Be careful, Dorothy," said the young man seriously. "It's the practical, commercial blood in your veins that gives you such ideas—ideas that are responsible for sign-boards on the verdant meadows; ideas that turn roaring cataracts into docile mill-hands. Nature is a goddess to be worshipped; but when you make her your mistress, when you despoil her of her beauty, what is left for the children of man? She will become merely the creature of our baser passions, and that shroud of purity will be torn away. The world is filled with her desecrators; men who, if they could, would tear the stars out of the heavens and sell them for precious stones in the market-places; men quite careless of what has gone before, of what will come hereafter—tenants of the earth who would leave the Master's house in ruins when they go."

"Oh, Hector," cried Dorothy, "I love to hear you talk that way. If only you would be more serious at times. You haven't spoken so in months."

"No," answered McDonald, "I haven't. Every-

thing in my life has been so serious of late, that naturally I've been flippant."

"Please be serious, Hector. Tell me about your work. Has anything been accepted yet?"

"No; and it never will be until I turn thief, bigamist, or murderer."

"What?"

"Yes, exactly so. The key of crime fits the lock of fame nowadays. Show me a man who has committed some blood-red deed—some deed that shocks the world to silence—and I will show you a man who can have his words of wisdom printed in any periodical of the day. He doesn't even have to be a good writer. That isn't necessary. He may butcher the English language as he has his victim, yet the magazines will take his stuff; no, more than that, they'll come and beg him for it. A little later you'll read his story: 'Gambling with the Gangsters, by Sam The Strangler'; 'Doublecrossing the Devil, by Gimlet Gyp'; or 'From the Crib to the Electric Chair, by Bloody Bill.' And what delicious titbits of literature they are! You often wonder how they strike grammatical English as well as they do; and you are impressed with the feeling that beneath the playfully rough exteriors of 'Sam The Stran-

gler,' 'Gimlet Gyp,' and 'Bloody Bill,' are fine sterling qualities—qualities that under a different environment would have made of these bad men good citizens, the kind that stand up and cheer when the band plays 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' ”

“You’re growing bitter,” said Dorothy.

“I am,” assented Hector. “All failures are bitter; and I’m a failure until I’ve murdered somebody. I’ve been thinking it over lately; and unless I commit some kind of crime, like strangling little Tommy or hitting Uncle Tobias over the head, my chances for literary success are null and void. I can only be famous by first being infamous, Dorothy.”

“But you musn’t talk that way! Of course it’s all right with me, but somebody else might take you seriously. And if anything really did happen to your Uncle Tobias, they would——”

“Blame me for it? Exactly. That’s what I long for, Dorothy. Of course I don’t wish any harm to Uncle Tobias; but if anybody did tap him on the head and I was arrested on suspicion, think of the chance it would give me to sell my murder stories. The newspapers brimming over with a murder mystery, and stories to be had from the apparent murderer!—why all the magazines in the country would

be after me. How the editors would bid for my story: 'Why I killed Uncle!' I would be in print at last; and the critics, reading my work, would discover the gems of genius. They would call me immortal!"

"And the electrician in Sing Sing would quickly disprove their assertion," broke in Dorothy. "You hadn't thought of that, Hector."

"But I have," replied the young man. "I've thought of it many, many times. I would prove my innocence at the trial; I would go out of the prison a free and glorified man; and then, as always happens in best sellers, I would marry and live happy ever afterwards."

"Father often says that your brain is a storeroom filled with mental toys," said Dorothy thoughtfully, "and for the once I agree with him. You take a thought, as a child picks out a purple cow, because of its unnatural and impossible colour, and you play with it quite contentedly for weeks, realising all the time that it can never mature into anything."

"And I can only answer, Dorothy, that I prefer mental toys to ledgers, bank-books, and safes. They're not such a load to carry around on one's shoulders. Probably no one will ever brain Uncle Tobias or strangle little Tommy, but still there's a

certain pleasure in thinking that they will. Now don't be shocked—you know what I mean."

"Yes, but it's lucky for you that Tommy's mother isn't here. She wouldn't."

"And before she gets back," said McDonald, "I'll leave. I know that I'd make some kind of fool remark. Besides, for the last few minutes I've been conscious of a certain frigidity in the atmosphere which presages the coming of your male parent. Probably at this very moment he is hurtling towards us from his den of commercialism. Your father, like all great events, casts his shadow before. Are you coming down with me? Good. Like the policeman, I find myself best at whispering sweet nothings in the vestibule."

They left the nursery, like two children, hand in hand, leaving behind them in the dusky room the mute, dejected toys. The rocking-horse alone still maintained its stiff, unbending look of equine superiority. The broad staircase, and the great hall beneath it, were alive with crawling shadows; the paintings on the wall were erased by the careless hand of night; and everything had become vague, unreal—even the youthful figures descending through the gloom.

Hector had some difficulty in finding his hat. "William will catch it, if your father comes home and finds the hall as dark as this," he said.

"I'll warn him in time."

"That's like you, Dorothy. You're always so thoughtful—so kind."

He kissed her, and, opening the front door, stepped out into the twilight. Dorothy remained motionless for a moment, and then, moved by a sudden impulse, followed him. Standing on the stoop, she watched his retreating figure. For several yards his step was steady and sure; then it faltered somewhat, and his shoulders drooped. He never looked back, never saw her watching him with that maternal air which only good women give to those they love. No, he plodded on wearily; and, far down the shadowy street, above the flickering city-lights, a host of grey storm-clouds were gathering.

CHAPTER XIII

AN HOUR after Hector McDonald's departure found Dorothy and her sister in the nursery, performing the solemn rites that invariably attended Tommy's bedtime. On this evening, owing to the serious illness of the nurse's mother, they were forced to assume all responsibility. They had given the child a bath, put on his nightgown, and placed him in his crib; but at this point their actual troubles began. Tommy sat bolt upright, and, with the wrath of an abused monarch, demanded that every one of his toy animals should be brought to him for the good-night kiss.

"Nellie brings 'em to me," he wailed. "Even my mangy rabbit wif the bushy tail."

There was no use in defying Tommy; no use in stealthily leaving the room, on some pretext, not to return again until Sleep had claimed him for Her own. The child was his grandfather over again in obstinacy. When he wanted a thing, he was quite capable of keeping the whole house awake until he got it. Realising this, mother and aunt accepted the

inevitable and the hunt began. Zebras, lions, elephants, and cats, were dragged from their lairs to the youthful monarch's bedside; where their virtues, oddities, and histories were fully dwelt upon. Even the mangy rabbit with the bushy tail—an especial favourite—was discovered under the bed in hiding, and was dragged out to be imprisoned in Tommy's chubby arms.

What a menagerie the child had! What a memory the child had! Time and again the two women thought that the hunt must be over, only to have their hopes shattered by a cry of command: "I wants my green frog," or, "I wants my monkey"; and the chase would commence all over again. All things have to end; and at last every one of the animals had been found, presented, and kissed. The rocking-horse alone remained. It was a stalwart example of its kind—this rocking-horse—and it was moved only with difficulty. Dorothy seized it firmly by the mane and pulled with all her might, her sister pushed it from behind; and, between the two of them, they at last succeeded in bringing it up to the crib, where it submitted to Tommy's caress with the curling lip of scorn peculiar to rocking-horses. The child for the moment seemed satisfied with this last

herculean feat, and sank back on his pillow. But soon his inventive little brain began to concoct new plans to stay awake.

"Now, my dear boy, you must say your prayers and go to sleep," said his mother.

Tommy suddenly had an idea. Sitting bolt upright, he cried: "Oh, Auntie, Auntie, tell me a story! Nellie tells me stories at bedtime."

At this Dorothy turned to the despairing mother. "That's all right, Grace," she said. "I'll tell him a story, while you go up and get those things you need. I'll put him to sleep before you get back."

The elder woman, whose sloping shoulders were a poor support for any responsibility, hurried out of the room; and Dorothy commenced her story:

"Once upon a time there was a very bad little boy. And the worst part of this little boy was that he shouldn't have been bad, for he had everything he wanted."

"Did he have animals like me?" asked Tommy in a sleepy voice.

"Yes, he had hundreds of animals; and what's more, he had a loving mother and an aunt. He lived in a great big house with servants to wait upon him, and yet this bad little boy wouldn't do as he

was told. He was a very bad little boy indeed! When bedtime came he would never go to sleep, but would make up all kinds of excuses to stay awake. One time an evil fairy, who lived out in the night all alone, thought to himself : 'I like loving mothers and aunts, animals and big houses!' So that very evening—and it was an evening like this, with rain splashing against the window-panes—this evil fairy stole into the room, and, putting his cold wet hand over the little boy's mouth lifted him up and bore him away to his house in the storm-cloud. Then he took a magic bath in moonlight, which made him look just like the bad little boy, and came back and lived in the big house, and had a loving aunt and mother, and all the animals, and everything that the bad little boy had had. What do you think of that, Tommy?"

But there was no answer from the child. Bending over his crib, Dorothy heard the deep, regular breathing of sleep. "I thought a story with a moral would have the desired effect," she said to herself. "I'll not wake him up for his prayers!"

At that moment she heard nervous knocking outside. Rising to her feet, she tiptoed across the room

and opened the door. "Ssh!" she whispered, with a finger to her lips, "ssh! Tommy's asleep."

"It's h'only me, ma'am" said the butler in a low, but anxious voice; and Dorothy noticed that the man's usually blank face was alive with some strange emotion.

"What is it, William?" she asked quickly. "Nothing's happened to father?"

"H'o no, ma'am. Set your mind h'easy. Nothing's 'appened to 'im as I knows of, ma'am. It's somethin' as I found h'out in the vestibule h'all wrapped up in a rubber coat."

"Out in the vestibule! What is it, William?"

"The bell rang; and, when I h'answers it, there's nothing there but that. It give me a start, it did."

"What is it, William?"

"It's—but come and look for yourself, ma'am. Step down to the 'allway. I'd like for you to see it yourself, ma'am."

Dorothy, burning with excitement, followed the bewildered butler down the stairs and into the now brightly lighted hallway. There in one corner, near the door, lay a large black bundle. She approached it, and, bending down, saw two beady eyes staring up at her.

"Good Heavens, William!" she gasped. "It's a baby!"

"That's what I say, ma'am," said the butler with stoic composure. "But where it 'as come from, do beat me."

"Yes," repeated Dorothy, staring dazedly into the two steady shoe-button eyes beneath her, "where could it have come from?"

"It's raining h'as it were cats and dogs h'outside, ma'am," suggested William, with a sickly smile, "but——"

At this point Dorothy's presence of mind returned, and she cut the man short. "Run upstairs and tell Mrs. Smithers I want her," she ordered.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Tommy's mother arrived on the scene, she found Dorothy the centre of a crowd of wildly excited servants, holding in her arms a black-eyed baby whose stoic indifference of face rivalled even the butler's habitual lack of expression. Miss Arlington had removed the rubber coat. She now held the child firmly, if unscientifically, disclosing the fact to the astonished group that it wore merely the flimsiest of nightgowns.

At this sight, Mrs. Smithers descended the stairs with some trepidation. As is common with most women of her type, the presence of an unexplained baby in the house hinted at disgraceful intrigues—intrigues that must be met by righteous sternness and dismissal. Before she had reached the bottom step, she was firmly convinced that Jenny, her maid—whose ambition found expression in personal adornment—was implicated in this.

"Well, what do you think, Grace?" asked Dorothy.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. Smithers weakly. "What do *you* think?"

"I think that it's an outrage!" cried the girl with spirit. "Why, the poor little thing had nothing over it but that rubber coat! It's murder—that's what I think it is!"

"It's h'outrageous, ma'am," said William with conviction, "and yet it 'appens regular. When I was in London, I 'eard of cases. H'Abandoned creatures is what I calls 'em, h'askin' your pardon ma'am."

"And you found it outside the house?" asked Mrs. Smithers in a relieved tone.

"I found 'im, ma'am," said the butler, stepping forward. "I 'eard the bell ring; I h'answered it; and there 'e was on the mat."

"And he hasn't cried once!" broke in Dorothy. "He's a brave little fellow. We must get him to bed before he catches cold."

"But where, Dorothy?" asked her sister nervously.

"Why, in the nursery, of course—in the crib Tommy used to have before he outgrew it."

"But Tommy sleeps in the nursery."

"Well, what of it, Grace?" cried Dorothy, moved by the plight of her new-found protégé. "It won't do Tommy any harm to sleep in the same room with another baby. You'll make him a little snob."

"There are diseases——" began Tommy's mother.

"Nonsense! Look at his cheeks. I never saw a more healthy looking child."

"Father wouldn't like it, Dorothy."

"Bother father! Even if he doesn't like it, he'll have to put up with it for to-night at least. You don't think I'd throw him out in the rain again, do you?"

"There are charitable organisations," suggested Mrs. Smithers, timidly. "Perhaps if we called up the police station——"

"The police station! I should say not! Come, the child might catch pneumonia while we stand here arguing."

And Dorothy Arlington, with tight pressed lips and authoritative mien, still holding the child in her strong arms, started up the staircase, followed by her sister. They found Tommy still sleeping; but, at the sound of their footsteps and the bustle attending the making up of his old crib, he awoke. And, perhaps because his aunt's story had woven itself into the pattern of his dreams, at the sight of the child with the expressionless black eyes, he burst into a wail of terror. At last he quieted down somewhat, but continued to cast fearful glances at his guest from time to time.

They had put the little foundling to bed; and his tiny round face, surmounted by its stiff black hair, lay on the pillow with a kind of dull resignation. As Dorothy said, he was more like a doll than a child. When he was placed in any position, he remained in that position until he was moved. One felt that his beady, steadfast eyes would remain open till one touched the spring that closed them. His ambition seemed already to have been formed—the ambition to go through life as a stick of furniture: to be moved, to be used, to be abused, and to remain dumb. A lack of expression can conceal the workings of the mind and the age of the mind. Father Time as often looks out of our eyes as he writes his signature on our foreheads.

"I wonder why he doesn't say anything, Grace?" asked Dorothy. "Do you think that he's too young?"

"No; I should say he was three. Perhaps he's dumb."

"Do you want anything to eat, dear?" said Dorothy, bending over her protégé.

The thin red lips never trembled; the black beady eyes remained fixed on the ceiling.

"Oh, he *is* dumb!—the poor little thing! Perhaps that's the reason his wicked parents wanted to get

rid of him. But we must give him something to eat. Nellie, run down stairs and tell the cook to send up some milk toast. Hurry, please!"

After the milk toast had been prepared, served and eaten, Mrs. Smithers went up to her own room to get some of the things she had left there in the excitement of the butler's news. Dorothy remained, attempting to amuse the little waif with Tommy's toys—very much to that gentleman's indignation, expressed in another series of long-drawn wails. Perhaps the remembrance that his aunt's evil fairy had a certain predilection for animals caused this unnatural niggardliness, and also the strange look of terror and morbid curiosity with which he favoured the little stranger. However, one fact should have allayed Tommy's fears; and that was the air of indifference with which this strange child examined the lions, bears and zebras of his fine collection.

At last Mrs. Smithers returned to find Dorothy at her wits'-end. She had just given him the mangy rabbit with the fuzzy tail, only to see that cherished relic favoured with a cold unseeing stare. What could cause that sombre little face to light up for a single instant? Evidently nothing. She had tried all

her wiles, and they had failed. She looked at him hopelessly; and then, at that very moment, she saw a sudden change—a sudden flash of light in the gloomy eyes—a sudden nervous twitching about the lips. The child seemed to be looking past her. Turning, she saw her sister entering the room. What could interest him in that, she wondered?

Suddenly the child stretched out his arms towards Mrs. Smithers with a strange, gurgling noise, like water running out of the end of a bottle; and in a flash Dorothy knew what had excited him so—what he craved for. It was her sister's glittering, diamond necklace; the necklace her father had given her for a wedding present.

"Come over here, Grace," she called. "He wants to see your diamond necklace. Thank Heavens! I have found something to interest him!"

"*Goo, goo, goo,*" gurgled the child.

"Just a moment, Dorothy—I've got to put my jewel-case in the drawer. I almost forgot it in the excitement. It would have kept me awake all night if I had. I can never sleep unless they're near me—all those dear things of Fred's."

As Mrs. Smithers crossed the room and put the round jewel case in the upper drawer, not once did

the child's strange black eyes leave her. He seemed to be beckoning her back with them.

"Come here, Grace," Dorothy called.

The elder woman turned and approached the crib leisurely. At her every step, the eyes of the child seemed to grow brighter. It was as though they reflected the cold, scintillating light of the precious stones. Now Mrs. Smithers was beside him. Obeying her sister's directions, she bent over the tiny waif so that the necklace swung just above his face.

"*Goo, goo, goo,*" he gurgled; and then, before Tommy's mother could cry out, before Dorothy could move, a firm little hand shot out from the bedclothes, seized the diamond necklace, and pulled at it with all its might. There was a cry of indignation and pain from Mrs. Smithers, an exclamation of surprise from Dorothy, then a sharp snap. The necklace parted, slipped off its owner's neck, and remained in the child's eager fingers.

"Good Heavens!" cried Mrs. Smithers indignantly. "He's broken my necklace! I hope you're satisfied, Dorothy!" She pried open the hands of the little waif and regained her property.

"Don't be angry, Grace!" said Dorothy; "I'm sure the baby didn't mean to hurt your necklace. Besides,

it's only a link in the chain. You can easily have it fixed. He was just a trifle overeager, that's all."

"I should think he was! He's terribly strong, too! Why, the chain actually cut into my neck! Well, I'll put the necklace in my jewel box and take it down to Tiffany's to-morrow."

Again Mrs. Smithers crossed the room to the bureau; and again the child followed her with his eyes. Dorothy wondered why they should still wear that look of pleased anticipation now that his toy was taken out of his reach. It was strange how dull they had been at first, and how bright they were now. The face of the baby seemed to have been changed by them, to have grown older—years older.

"Do you know that we'll be very late for dinner, Dorothy?" asked her sister. "William announced it while I was up-stairs getting my things together. I'm going to make Tommy say his prayers; and then we've got to go right down. You know how pleasant father is, when we're late."

"Very well, Grace. But getting Tommy to say his prayers isn't such an easy matter."

Yet Dorothy was wrong. Tommy, for the once, showed a perfect willingness to say his prayers. No, more than that. Instead of mumbling through them

as he usually did, he now said them slowly and distinctly with a scared look from time to time at the little black-eyed stranger across the room.

“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I should die before I wake
I pray——”

But at this moment there was a restless movement in the other child’s crib; and Tommy faltered and stopped short.

“I pray the Lord my soul to take,” murmured Mrs. Smithers.

“I pray the Lord my soul to take,” repeated Tommy. “God bless Mother, and Aunt Dorothy, and Granpa, and Granma.”

“Good-night, dear,” said his mother, bending over him.

“Good-night, Mother. Good-night, Auntie. Auntie, bad fairies can’t hurt good little boys what says their prayers, can they?”

“No, dear,” answered Dorothy, reassuringly. Walking over to the light, she turned it very low and followed her sister out of the room.

The two children were alone with the shadows. Only a tiny greenish flame, like a flower sprouting

in a garden of darkness, marked the spot where the light had been. Tommy stared at it, until suddenly it became an eye—a pale malignant eye, which gradually assumed the black, horrible body of a dream. He fell asleep at last with a sigh. His breathing became regular and heavy.

Outside the wind hurled its volley of rain against the house; the shutters groaned and muttered to one another; the window-panes seemed to weep great tears—tears that hid their once transparent mystery by grief. Invisible fingers seemed tapping on the glass—invisible faces seemed peering in.

And what of the little waif? Does he fear the shadows of the night—does he wish companionship in the long, dark, weary hours—does he long to have a little body, like his own, beside him now? It seems impossible. And yet why is he slipping noiselessly out of bed—why is he crawling along the floor like a huge black spider——why is he bending over Tommy so lovingly, so tenderly, so caressingly?

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Dorothy and Mrs. Smithers entered the dining-room, they found their parents already seated in their accustomed places—Mr. Arlington at the head of the board, Mrs. Arlington at the foot. It had often seemed to the younger girl that not merely a few feet of shining mahogany separated these two, but that it symbolised something else—possibly a great chasm of life that nothing could bridge; or the dividing line separating strength from weakness, success from failure. Often she had stretched out her hands to them, attempting to draw them together, to make them as one—and always she had failed. Finally, she realised that nothing she could do would ever accomplish a mental union between these two; that, without mutual understanding, loneliness is inevitable. If the one could know a single hour of weakness, if the other could know a single hour of strength, then this chasm might be bridged—but not till then.

On this night, the contrast of character was mirrored on their faces to a marked degree. Mr. Arling-

ton, just back from a day of triumph on the Street, was especially square of jaw and keen of eye; Mrs. Arlington, after an ineffectual afternoon's sewing for charity, was especially faded out and wan looking. They faced each other with the vague hostility of substance and shadow, of health and sickness, of matter and nerves.

"Late as usual, Dot," said the ogre of the house, frowning over his soup. "Do you think this is a hotel?"

"It was Tommy, father," broke in Mrs. Smithers. "He wouldn't go to sleep."

"Wouldn't go to sleep, eh? When I was a boy, if I didn't go to sleep when I was told, I was strapped till I did."

"Oh, John," cried Mrs. Arlington faintly, "it isn't possible! How could you?"

"There was none of this namby-pamby business when I was a boy," he continued unheedingly. "Fathers were fathers then, and mothers were mothers. When a child stayed awake, he was beaten; when he cried, he was beaten; and when he laughed out loud, he was beaten. A licking was the universal medicine then. But now how is it? Why, any nasty brat can raise a disturbance, can put a whole house-

hold topsy-turvy. It's a regular business with them. They howl, and get a stick of candy for shutting up. No wonder they do it—it pays!"

"But Tommy isn't a nasty little brat!" said Dorothy. "He's a dear sweet-tempered child."

"He *is* a nasty little brat," said her father, giving her a bullying look. "He's a nasty spoilt little brat. I should know—I'm his grandfather."

Dorothy was about to reply with heat, when suddenly William appeared behind her chair and uttered a few low spoken words which changed the topic of conversation.

"I begs pardon, Miss Dorothy," said he, "but the maid h'asked me to h'ask you if you might be wantin' some of Master Tommy's h'old clothes what 'es h'outgrown. She 'as 'em in her trunk, ma'am; and she says as 'ow they'll fit the new baby."

In the lull that preceded the storm, Dorothy, mastering with difficulty her inclination to laugh, murmured: "Yes, William, have them brought up to the nursery."

"How's this? What's this?" cried Arlington, leaning forward and regarding his younger daughter with a look of mingled amazement and suspicion. "What's this about babies, Dot?"

"It's a child that was left on the front stoop, John," said Mrs. Arlington. "I didn't know anything about it, till William told me. Dorothy never tells me anything."

"O mother, how could I?" cried Dorothy. "I didn't know where you were, and the poor little thing was all wet and shivering."

"And so you brought it in the house, Dot," continued Arlington, "instead of having William run out and get the nearest policeman? Well, I hope you called up the station at least. Have they sent for it yet?"

"No, I didn't call up the police-station. He's going to stay here to-night, father," and Dorothy faced her irate parent fearlessly.

For a moment glance met glance; and then Arlington, realising that his foot nearly touched the invisible line beyond which he never went in opposing and tantalising his daughter, veered around on another tack.

"And who left this little ragamuffin here?" said he.

"We don't know, father," said Mrs. Smithers soothingly. "Probably his parents wanted to get rid of him. The poor little thing is deaf and dumb."

"Oh, I see!" cried Arlington. "His mother and

father, eh? Well, that's natural enough. By the way, Dot; has your Spring poet been here lately? I mean the little puppy I don't like—Hector McDonald."

"Yes, this afternoon. What of it?"

"This reminds me of him, that's all. It's his kind of humour. First he brings a parrot that can't talk, and then perhaps he brings a baby that can't talk."

"What do you mean, father?" cried Dorothy, rising to her feet. "What are you hinting at?"

But before Arlington could side-step the issue in his usual adroit fashion, there came a slight sound to the ears of all four—a dull, jarring sound like the slamming of a heavy door.

"What was that?" cried Mrs. Arlington, starting nervously. "It sounded like the front door."

"It certainly did," said her husband grimly. "Go out into the hall, William, and see if anybody's there."

When the butler returned his face was as blank as a bare, white-washed wall. "There's nobody there, sir," said he.

"Then somebody went out. Where are all the servants? It was one of them, I'll take my oath—going out by the front door, too, as though they owned the house! I'll have a look into this."

"They're h'all downstairs, Mr. H'Arlington. I stopped to h'inquire, sir."

"Then what was that noise?"

"It's a 'orrible night h'outside. The wind 'as risen, and a shutter 'as broke loose—that's what I think it was, sir."

"It may be so," said Arlington, gloomily sipping his coffee, "but I could have sworn it was the door." And, as he drank the steaming liquid, he looked about him at the windows, the doors, the curtains. He was an intensely suspicious man, and any sudden noise that he could not explain caused him all manner of nervous worry.

Dorothy was the first to leave the table. Excusing herself, she hurried out into the hallway and up the great winding staircase. She intended going directly to her own room; but, when she reached the first landing, she noticed that Tommy's door was open and wondering at it, remembering that she had closed it an hour before. Somebody must have gone in there since then. But who? The servants were all down-stairs, and the nurse was out. Perhaps the wind had blown it open. At any rate, she determined to see if everything was all right.

Dorothy pushed the door open and entered. The

room seemed to be just as she had left it. At least the pale flickering gas-jet, like some kind of tiny tongue lapping up the darkness, had not changed. But as she stood there, hesitating, she became conscious of a perceptible change in this room—a change in atmosphere perhaps—a change as though something, which had lived here, had suddenly gone away.

She stood beneath the gas-jet, listening to the silence of that gloomy little room. Outside, the shutters muttered to one another, the wind sang its everlasting chorus—but here, in the nursery, there was not a sigh or whisper, not even a long drawn breath.

With a quick nervous gasp, Dorothy turned up the light. Across the room she could see Tommy, evidently fast asleep. Her eyes wandered to the other crib; she cried out in astonishment and fear. The clothes were thrown back in disorder. The bed was empty!

“Perhaps he has crept over to Tommy’s crib and gone to sleep with him,” she thought. Crossing the room quickly, she bent over her nephew. No, he wasn’t there.

“Tommy,” she whispered. “Wake up, dear.” She put her hand on his shoulder. He remained as motionless as a tiny waxen figure, and his body felt

cold to her touch. "Tommy," she cried nervously, "wake up! It's Aunt Dorothy! Don't be frightened. I—"

She hesitated and stopped. At that moment she saw that his face was unnaturally white, and that there was a great black bruise on his forehead. Good God! What was this? She felt that her senses were leaving her. By a great effort of will, she put her hand on the child's breast. His heart-beats were almost imperceptible. "Help!" she cried. "Help!" She fell fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. ARLINGTON sat alone in his library, staring blankly at the rows of books that circled the room. It was very late, and the chill of morning was in the air. Unheeded, the fire had gone out long ago; and now the hearth was grey with ashes. From time to time this powdery substance stirred slightly, as though some buried thing were struggling there. On these occasions, the old man would move uneasily and stare at the open fireplace with something like terror in his eyes. But this look would soon die out of them, and they would return to a dull contemplation of the books that lined the walls.

Like these books, Arlington's exterior told nothing of what lay within—nothing of the joy or sorrow, love or hate, that lay within. And this was a comfort to him now, as it had always been. This face of marble, these eyes of clouded glass, shut out the world so completely, warning off cruel sympathy, and crying aloud in a terrible voice: "Be off! There is no weakness here."

And none had come to him with their tears, none had sought him out to weep on his shoulder; not

even Dorothy had come. So he was alone; yet thankful, because he feared himself. Somewhere within him were weak, womanly tears—an ocean of bitter, foolish tears. And he feared these tears; he feared that they might take him off his guard and gush out of his eyes. This seemed a monstrous thing to Arlington—that he should weep, that he should ever feel the need to weep. It would change him somehow. It might chisel his face anew, and wash the clouded eyes with tears.

An hour ago he had seen two strange men in the hallway—two men carrying leather bags. They were approaching Tommy's room with a businesslike, methodical step. Looking at them, Arlington felt a terrible sensation—a sensation as though he had lost everything in the world. At that moment he felt that his grandson was going to die. It was as though a cold hand had been laid across his eyes.

Then very slowly, with clenched teeth and dragging feet, he had descended the stairs, and, entering the library, had closed the door carefully. For some time he had stood in the middle of the room, staring up at the ceiling. Once, thinking he heard a slight sound from above, he had clapped his hand to his mouth as though to imprison an escaping cry.

Now, as Arlington sat before the dead ashes,

words which he had not heard for years echoed in his brain—echoed there and moved him strangely. Why should this phrase: "Suffer little children to come unto Me," affect him so? He had heard it before so many, many times. And then again, that other one: "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"—what was there in that to bring a lump in his throat and a mist before his eyes?

But now, quite suddenly, the old man realised the meaning of these wonderful words. Yes, well might a loving God say to him: "Suffer little children to come unto Me. From that cold, unfeeling breast, from that lack of understanding of the beautiful and pure, from that domineering authority of old age, fly to this loving heart, my children. See, these arms are open for you! They have been nailed thus, so that one day they might embrace the world. Come unto Me, my children! And you, the desecrator; you, who tread upon the flowers only to mourn them when they die, stand aside and suffer the little children to come unto Me. The Lord hath given to the undeserving, and the Lord hath taken away; therefore I say: 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' "

And with this knowledge of a supreme justice, with this realisation of a supreme truth, the old man

seemed to see himself as a stranger. The fumes of his burning egotism blew away from his brain; and with them went all the forced firmness of that chiselled face of stone, all the coldness in those clouded eyes of glass. This man of ice was melting; yes, perhaps melting into tears. All alone in his gloomy library, these words, like a gentle breeze, seemed to stir the ashes in his heart, seemed to kindle there the flame that melted him into these tears: "Suffer little children to come unto Me," and: "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Why had he steeled himself to kind emotions? Why had he made of his heart a secret chamber? Why had he never revealed it to his dear ones—not even to that tiny childish form? And now it was too late. Yes, that was the pity of it—it was too late!

And this was terrible to the old man—this hopeless knowledge that Tommy might never know that his grandfather loved him, had always loved him. He might rush out into the night, he might cry aloud in the still air; but all this would mean nothing—nothing!

Arlington remembered the many times he had

watched the child at play, the many opportunities he had missed to make his grandson love him. Why had he warned off that warm little heart? Why had he shut himself out of the garden of the world—the garden where all the beautiful flowers grow, the flowers of affection for the little children? Yes, why had he done this thing? False shame was at the bottom of it. All his life he had lived behind a mask, only to have it stripped from his face and to find himself a fool—yes, a fool who had been ashamed to show affection for a child.

Suddenly the library door opened. The old man started, and turned his head. Dorothy stood on the threshold, looking in at him. There were tears in her eyes, but a smile played about her lips.

"Tommy will live, father," she said. "Doctor Carter told me that he is out of danger."

"Thank God!"

The wind sighed down the chimney; the ashes trembled like a grieving human breast; Arlington still sat silent in his chair—yet the lamp-light no longer fell on a face of marble and on eyes of clouded glass.

CHAPTER XVII

HECTOR McDONALD put his latch-key in the lock, turned it, and pushed the door open. "Welcome to my humble home, Jim," he called back over his shoulder. "Come, step right in."

A tall, thin young man, who had followed Hector like his shadow, now passed him and entered the shabby little room.

"You'll find a safe chair near the window," continued McDonald. "The other may be considered a delusion and a snare. I'll sit on the lounge myself. So—now we're homelike and comfortable."

The thin young man availed himself of the proffered chair suspiciously, prodding it first with his finger and then sinking down cautiously on its faded velvet cushion. "Yes, it's all right," he said at last; and, lolling back, he threw one bony leg over the other and clasped his hands behind his head. The afternoon sunlight streaming in through the window fell full on his long yellow face, accentuating the hollows under his cheekbones and resting in his eyeglasses which in turn reflected little round patches of light on either cheek.

"Well Mac," he said, "how's the world been treating you? Why is it that I find the Crœsus of the campus living—you'll pardon the frankness—in this rat-hole? How have the mighty fallen? Tell me; I want to know." And, as he spoke, he changed his position in the chair like lightning. He leaned forward expectantly with an almost feverish intensity. "Tell me," he repeated; "I want to know."

"Uncle Tobias disinherited me."

"Woman, or literature?"

"What do you mean, Jim?"

"The reason, of course. Why did Uncle Tobias disinherit you? Are temperate, well-behaved young gentlemen disinherited for drunkenness? No. For other bad habits? No. Two things are left: woman and ambition. Which is it? Why waste the English language?"

"Now I see what you are driving at. You're so quick that you take a man's breath away. It was my ambition—my literature—that did it."

"I see. Are you going to quit?"

"My writing? No, of course not."

"Are you going to starve?"

"Well, it looks very much that way, Jim. But for heaven's sake take off those eyeglasses! You

shouldn't wear them. They're not becoming. You didn't have them at college."

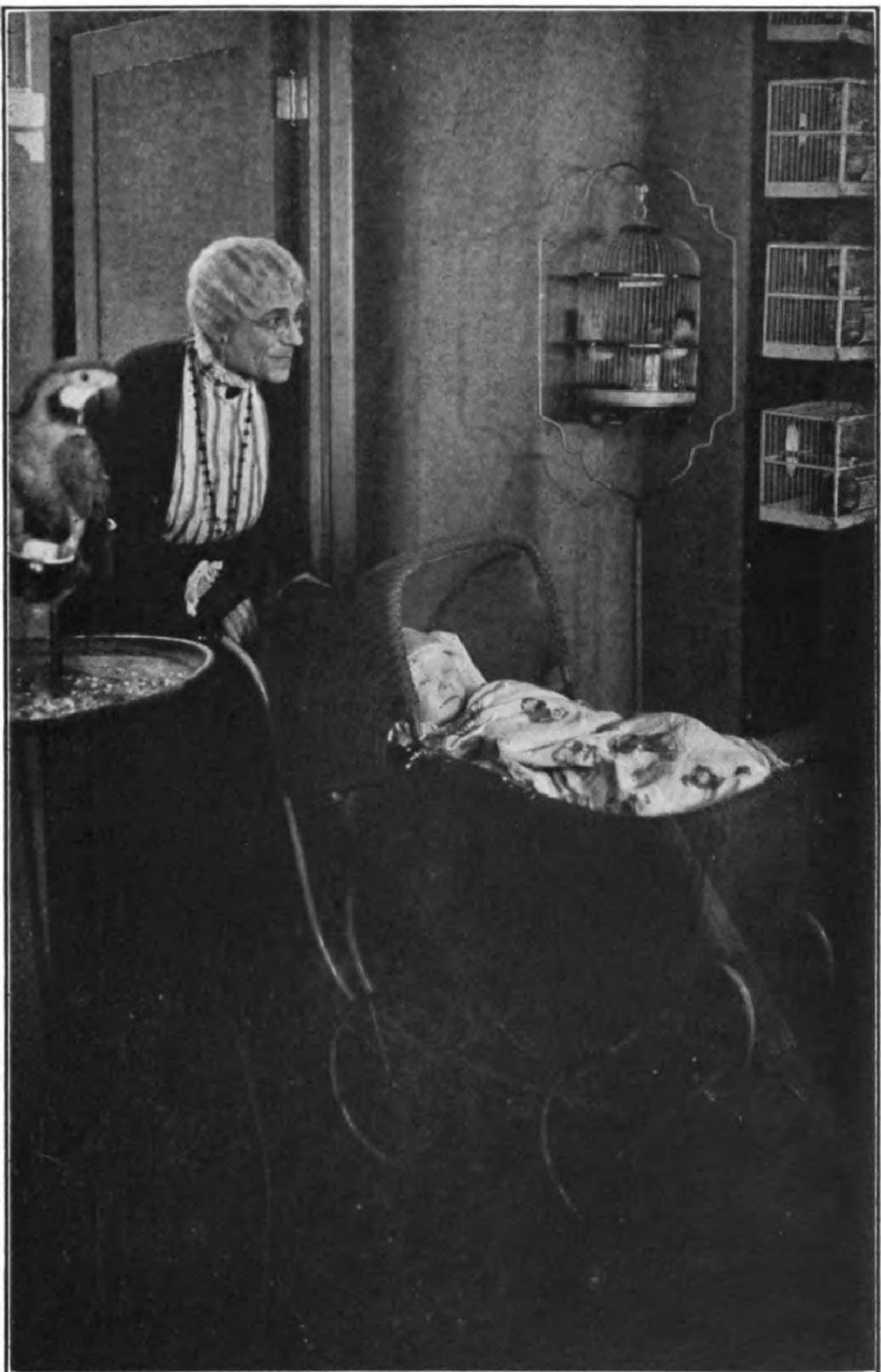
"No, I didn't. I'll take them off. Here, have a look at them. Do you see anything peculiar?"

McDonald took the eyeglasses from a hand that shot out like a released spring, and examined them carefully. Finally he put them on his nose, and peered through them at his friend. "Why, they're not at all powerful!" he said.

"No, just plain glass. A dodge, a trick. Gives the intellectual look. Hides the expression in my eyes. Good to wear while examining witnesses."

"That's so, you're a full-fledged lawyer now. Have you had many cases?"

"None that I wanted. Stupid cases! A dog thief; a tipsy sailor for assault and battery. What fun is there in that? No wonder that lawyers lose imagination these days. All the clever criminals stay out of jail, and the trials aren't worth sitting through. Now there was the murder of old Glover in his conservatory. That looked promising. What happened? Nothing. The police bungled it; and we never had any trial. Then there was the case of Arlington's grandson and the disappearing baby. But, hello,



Scene from the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production "The Unholy Three," starring Lon Chaney.

what's the matter? You know something about that, eh?"

McDonald had started involuntarily at that familiar name, for it conjured up the memory of the last few months—the memory of what had followed Tommy's sickness. He seemed to see Dorothy, as he had seen her on that day when he learned the news. How pale and sad she had been! Since then he had tried in every way to cheer her, to wipe out of her mind the horror of that night. But all his attempts had failed; and once, finding her in an unguarded moment, he had learned the true reason why they *had* failed.

It was not a healthy sorrow that had made Dorothy what she was, that had changed her in an instant from a laughing girl into a silent sombre woman, that had robbed her of the buoyancy of youth—no, it was not a healthy sorrow, for it was mixed with a bitter potion of remorse. Calmly, almost coldly, she had told him that she blamed herself for what had happened; that she felt convinced that, if she had not taken the baby in from the street, all this might never have happened. And although he had tried to persuade her differently, although he had struggled

with this fixed idea; still, when he had left her, he knew that he had failed.

"You know something of this, Mac?" continued the young lawyer, bending forward hungrily. "Tell me, now; I want to know."

"I don't know anything more about the robbery than was in the newspapers," said Hector wearily. "I happen to know the family, that's all."

"Which one in particular, Mac?"

"You're the damnedest man for seeking information I ever saw! What good could it possibly do you to know? Well, if you must: it's Miss Dorothy Arlington."

"Engaged to her?"

"Yes—in a way."

"Father opposed to match?"

"Very much so, I imagine. Still, his character has changed lately."

"How changed? Since his grandson's sickness?"

"Yes, it affected him very much. No one suspected that he cared for the child. Certainly he never went out of his way to prove it. Yet Dorothy tells me he was all broken up. Several times she has found him crying in the library. If you knew him as well as I do, that would sound almost impossible."

"Remorse, regret. Watering his heart with tears. Flowers may grow there. But no clues?—no clues to the robbery? No circumstantial evidence?"

"There's only one piece of circumstantial evidence that I know of," said Hector. "As you are a friend of mine, I'll give it to you. Only one other person knows it; and probably she's forgotten. On the day of the murder I was at Arlington's house. I was alone with Dorothy—talking about writing. Now, listen, Jim. I claimed that the only way to break into the magazines was by first breaking into jail. I said that, if I strangled little Tommy or knocked Uncle Tobias over the head, I could sell every murder story that I had ever written. I suppose you'd call that circumstantial evidence, wouldn't you?"

"Strangled little Tommy!" muttered the lawyer, drawing his cheeks in and then puffing them out. "Strangled little Tommy! Did you say that, Mac?"

"Yes, Jim, those were my exact words."

"Then let me give you a piece of advice. You don't want to be telling everybody you see. Men have been arrested for less than that. It shows that the idea was in your mind."

"It *has* been for a long time," said McDonald thoughtfully. "I don't mean the idea of murdering

anybody; but the idea of being arrested for some crime that I had never committed,—of causing a big stir in the papers, and then at the trial of being proved innocent on an alibi or something. It would be my making. I would be a literary light before I came out of jail."

"You're not the only one who has dreams," said the tall young man. "I've had them myself. There's a hunch coming into my life some day that I'm going to play to the limit, even if I have to go it blind. There's a psychological moment in every man's life when, if he sees it, if he realises it, he's bound to win. It's only a case of keeping one's nerves tuned up to it; and I'm going to be sure that mine are. Common sense will never hold me back."

"The same old gambler you were at college, Jim."

"Yes; only now it's a bigger game. I'm not going in on every pot. I'm sitting tight, waiting for the right cards to come around; and you bet I'll know when they come. But, Mac, I've got to be running along now. I'm mighty glad I ran into you on the street. Here's my card. You might need it. You're just the sort to get into trouble."

"I hope I do, Jim," said Hector, taking the prof-

ferred card and slipping it carelessly into his pocket.
“I’ll call on you then, never fear.”

“Do it,” said the thin young man, readjusting the eyeglasses on his bony nose and rising to his feet. “I wish you all the luck in the world with Miss Arlington. I haven’t got time for the ladies myself. Too many serious things to do. Well, I’m off. Good-bye, Mac.”

The two friends shook hands; and the lawyer passed out through the open door. For some time after he had gone, McDonald sat lost in thought. Finally he pulled out the card and looked at it. On the little piece of pasteboard,—under the name “James Evans,”—was written in a small but legible hand: “The only attorney in New York who believes in hunches.”

“I wonder if he’s right,” McDonald muttered. “I wonder if every man has that one hunch, that psychological moment when he can’t lose? I haven’t had mine yet; and it’s getting time that I did.”

CHAPTER XVIII

UNCLE TOBIAS was very lonely in his big house. Even his collection of rubies failed to interest him as of old. He had gathered them in his many travels to as many different lands with the eagerness of a child collecting marbles; and each one could turn back the leaves of memory to different pages of the past. But now, for the first time, they had lain for many a night untouched in his safe. Perhaps Uncle Tobias was growing too old for either precious stones or marbles.

Since his last meeting with his nephew, the old man had ruthlessly torn Hector out of his heart—or so he imagined. His pride had been wounded so deeply that the healing scab had formed very slowly, and was in danger of being torn off at the slightest touch of memory.

Yes, he was very lonely in his gloomy house. He missed an intangible something that he had always had. Perhaps it was a bright young face at the dinner table, or a clear voice filled to the brim with joyous youth. Sometimes he caught himself wishing

that Hector was home again—of course not the present Hector, who had insulted him on the street; but the Hector of long ago; the little boy with the light brown hair and dark blue eyes. He had enjoyed coming home in the afternoons; he had enjoyed sitting in the library and watching the child play; he had enjoyed the arguments Hector had with his nurse when bedtime came—yes, he had enjoyed all these things.

There was a picture of McDonald in the library, taken when he was about that age. He was dressed in a sailor suit and held a big rubber ball in his hand. One night Uncle Tobias stood before it with something like a lump rising in his throat. Suddenly a wave of anger passed through him; and, snatching up the picture, he threw it, frame and all, into the open fireplace. As luck would have it, the glass was not broken; and for the time being the likeness of the child's face lay on a hot bed of coals smiling up at the old man with an innocent baby look of trust. Uncle Tobias lifted his foot over it, as though he were about to stamp it down beneath the burning ashes, then suddenly seized the tongs instead and drew it out to safety. The next day he went downtown and bought a tiny, golden frame.

Yes, it was very evident that Uncle Tobias was changing. Once he had been a man who, when he had decided on an action, carried out his decision immediately; but now he put things off from day to day. For instance, there was the drawing up of his will. Like many men of good health, he had never contemplated death seriously. It had always been very distant—very remote from self. Then, there had been no need of a will. Hector had been his only living relative; and what Uncle Tobias had would naturally go to him.

But now all this was changed. His health was not so good as it had been, and he very often felt tired after his walk. And then, coming home from the last meeting with his nephew, he had resolved to disinherit the young man immediately. "I'll have a will drawn up to-morrow leaving everything to charity," he had told himself; but, like the proverbial to-morrow, this to-morrow never came. From day to day he put it off, till at last the word meant nothing to him.

And time passed very slowly for Uncle Tobias. The minutes in his lonely house dragged themselves to hours; hours that, in a straggling procession, crawled on into days. And the solitary man, finding

his life an empty vault, longed for youthful companionship.

One bright Spring afternoon Uncle Tobias, while on his accustomed walk, moved by a sudden spirit of adventure and exploration, turned off the beaten path and made his way into a more obscure part of the city. Returning by a side street toward Fifth Avenue, and looking about him more than was his custom, he noticed a baby carriage standing outside a small bird-store.

Perhaps he was moved by curiosity, or some equally alien feeling, but certain it is, that, as he passed the perambulator, he peered under the white canopy straight into two round, black eyes. There was something in the owlish solemnity of this little face, something in that steadfast eager gaze, that took the old man's fancy. Looking about him hastily to see if he were observed, he retraced his steps and held out a long bony finger to the child. For some time the baby stared abstractedly; and then, putting up a firm little hand, he seized it and smiled.

Uncle Tobias returned the smile. "What's your name, my little man?" he asked.

"Tweedledee," said the child.

CHAPTER XIX

HECTOR McDONALD had always been a scrupulously well-dressed young man. His was a soul that found outer expression in personal adornment; a soul that shuddered at a loud necktie; a soul that sought artistic blendings in the materialistic life about him.

When he saw a man wearing loud *checks*, he said to himself: "Here is a fellow who has had a checkered career"—and he was very often right. When he met a man dressed in the best of taste, he said to himself: "Here is a fellow with some artistic feeling"—and he was very often wrong. The one had given full play to his character in a ready-made establishment; the other might very well have been toned down by environment and a tactful tailor's advice. It is generally a poor sheep that wears its sins on its back.

However, as has been said, Hector McDonald had always been a very well dressed young man. In all his twenty-three years of life—up to the winter of adversity—not once had he appeared on the street in

a garment undeserving the praise of a connoisseur of chappies. His hats had been invariably *distingué*; his collars well fitting and spotless; his coat a creation of contours; his shoes bright reflectors of opulence. He abhorred shabbiness; and a frayed cuff, in those days, would have caused him more internal discomfort than a frayed conscience.

Yes, so he had been a few months before; but see how he has changed. We find great difficulty in recognising this shabby figure, with dented derby and worn shoes, with ragged coat and shapeless trousers, wandering through the byways of the great metropolis. How has this transformation taken place in so short a time? Could this be the same jaunty young man who first sauntered into these pages so arrogant in the pride and hope of youth?

Yes, it is indeed the same. The articles of his extensive wardrobe have sought a summer of ease, and are now hanging haughtily among their inferiors in a dingy little shop around the corner. One by one his prejudices and niceties have melted away before the winter snow. Nature has put her hand on the young man's arm and has conducted him to the pawn-shop. He has sacrificed the outer to the inner man; he has preferred to line his stomach

rather than his overcoat. It has been a bitter lesson, but he has learned it well.

Yet why was it necessary to throw everything overboard? Surely he might have found a brush for his hat, or some polish for his shoes. A needle and thread might have worked wonders with that torn sleeve. Then why has everything gone to rack and ruin?

Because Hector McDonald never did anything by halves. When he was a young man of fashion, there were none who outdid him; none who so delighted a Fifth Avenue tailor's heart. And now there were none who outdid him in shabbiness, dinginess, and lack of personal pride. Why have a spotless derby when there's a ragged collar and greasy tie beneath it? Why brush one's shoes when there's a fringe of muddy cloth above them? Surely it was more artistic to let all go to ruin together. It offended the eye, certainly; but not so much as any forced contrast might do.

And now Hector McDonald shunned his old paths. He slunk through the byways of the city, dreading to meet some friend of happier days. Beneath his exterior of wretchedness, lurked a great sensitiveness for his sorry plight; a sensitiveness perhaps the more acute because of his former taste in dress.

He felt that he was a sore on the face of humanity; an acquaintance that might be greeted with shame; a man who should avoid his fellowmen. He had grown morbid on the subject, and had even given up seeing Dorothy. There were letters from her lying on his table at home—letters asking him to call; tearful letters, almost begging him to call. Reading them, he had said to himself: "How can I?" And looking at his ragged reflection in the mirror on the bureau, he had muttered: "I can't go like this. Perhaps that story will be accepted; and then I'll go." But the story had not been accepted, and time was passing. Spring was here.

Then whom *did* Hector visit, since his cowardly pride kept him from people of his own caste? At one place only, he called almost daily. He sat every afternoon in the bird-store, talking to the kind old lady—the old lady with the snowy ringlets, ringlets that rustled gently when she shook her head.

Yes, Mrs. Blake interested him greatly. She was never quite the same, except when little Willie was in the room. The child seemed to hold her to the normal. When he had been wheeled out to the pavement in front of the store, as he often was on these warm spring days, the old lady's natural queerness asserted itself—the touch of insanity that Hector

had guessed was there. She was like a ship sailing before the wind. As long as the helmsman was at the tiller, she was steady as a rock; but, as soon as he let go of it and stepped away, everything went mad. Coming up into the face of a gale of fancy, every sail, that had helped her on her course, now flapped about in wild disorder. Little Willie was this helmsman, and Hector thought that he steered with the hand of love.

And yet he liked her best when "The Silent One" was in his baby carriage on the street. What strange thoughts she had at these times! Leaning forward, she would whisper these thoughts into his ear—thoughts that, like tongues of flame, seemed to light up a wild, wind-tossed land of imagination.

One day he found her in a different mood. To his astonishment, without the slightest warning, she picked up her knitting and began to tear it into shreds, crying out against the drudgery of life.

"I didn't come into the world for this," she whispered, putting her lips close to McDonald's ear. "See that piece of paper there? Out in the street, I mean. See how gay it is, dancing along, singing along! Ah! that's happiness, that's freedom—with the wind at your back. I want to be like that piece

of paper some day, and let the wind take me over the meadows. Why, even the clothes on the line know him for their friend—the poor strangled clothes! How they struggle to follow him!—how they strike out with their arms and legs to get away! Oh it's pitiful—pitiful! It brings the tears to my eyes. But I'm tired of sitting still, when there's so much to do out there with the wind!"

"And little Willie? What would become of him?" asked Hector.

At that, the agitated face of the old lady calmed as though by magic; her curls ceased to rustle and her large wandering eyes sought the window. "I must bring him in," she said in a quiet, resigned voice. "He'll be angry if I don't." She was silent for a moment and then cried out in surprise: "Why, there's the old gentleman again!"

McDonald peered out above the row of parrot cages at the wicker baby-carriage standing by the door. For a moment he was speechless with astonishment. There, in front of little Willie, bending over the child with a long, bony finger held out in greeting, was none other than Uncle Tobias!—yes, Uncle Tobias from his shining boots to his shining

silk hat—Uncle Tobias with a strange smile on his once frigid face.

McDonald watched his relative in a kind of dumb amazement. The old man, unconscious of being observed, bent still lower and actually allowed little Willie to seize him by his pointed beard. Then, drawing away shamefacedly, Uncle Tobias put his hand in his pocket, and, pulling out a toy wrapped in tissue paper, presented it to the child. Little Willie, with a gurgle of infantile delight, seized the treasure; and the old man, with another smile, patted the little white hand and passed on.

"Well, I'll be damned!" cried Hector at last.

"Why, what's the matter, Mr. McDonald?"

"Do you know who that old chap is? That's Uncle Tobias, the man who turned me out of his house. You remember my telling you about it?"

"Oh, is it?" cried the old lady. "How glad little Willie would be if he knew that. He's very fond of him as it is, and the old gentleman thinks a lot of Willie. He comes here most every day and brings the child something. He must be awfully wealthy, Mr. McDonald?"

"As wealthy as Solomon," said Hector. "But this is a new dodge of his—taking to babies. How long has it been going on, Mrs. Blake?"

"It was about two weeks ago that I noticed him first, sir. Since then he's passed almost every day. I was thinking that maybe he would like to adopt Willie."

"You can't tell what *he'll* do," said Hector a trifle bitterly. "He turned me out, and now he's liable to bring somebody else in. That would be his idea of revenge. But you wouldn't part with Willie; would you, Mrs. Blake?"

"What size shoes do you wear?" asked the old lady, with her eyes on the baby-carriage.

"Seven—why?"

"Then you see that Willie couldn't fill your shoes. But look!"

Her eyes left the perambulator and became fixed on the piece of paper which was still flying about the street in the strong March breeze. It would remain perfectly motionless for a moment—as though gathering its strength—and then, running along the pavement with a rustling sound, it would finally bound up into the air.

"See how happy it is!" whispered the old lady, while a strange glitter stole into her large, luminous eyes. "How happy it is, playing with the wind! And I must sit here hour after hour, knitting!" Suddenly she put her lips to Hector's ear, so that he

felt her hot breath fanning his cheek. "If it wasn't for him,"—and she nodded toward the tiny figure through the glass—"if it wasn't for *him* I'd be with it now. I'd wander through the world, as I've often longed to do; I'd dance in the moonlight, and chase the wandering shadows home. He lied to me! He said that we would take Adventure by the hand and that She would lead us; that we would fly along like the wind; that we should go out into the world as to a dance. Lies! Lies! All lies! Adopt him? I wish the Devil in Hell would adopt him—and 'Cousin Harry,' too! They have me between them, Body and Mind. What can the voice do then? Can it leave the body and mind? No. It is doomed to constant slavery. But the wind calls to me; and sooner or later I shall go. Ssh! ssh! he will hear me. His cursed ears are so sharp! Look at him now!"

McDonald's eyes followed those of the crazed old lady. He saw that little Willie had changed his position in the baby-carriage. He now sat facing them—staring stolidly through the glass.

"Ssh!" whispered the old lady, "ssh!" And then in a louder tone she said: "So you wear size seven • shoes, Mr. McDonald?"

CHAPTER XX

“You have lied to me always, Tweedledee.”

It was Mrs. Blake who spoke. She was seated in her accustomed place beside the window. Her knitting lay neglected in her lap; her large luminous eyes wandered about the room. She seemed trying to avoid the sharp penetrating glance of her nephew. Little Willie sat up very straight in his wicker baby-carriage, his black beady eyes narrowed into two evil slits, his plump hands clenched into tiny fists.

“So I have lied to you, Echo?” piped the child.
“Hear our ‘Echo,’ Hercules!”

“Cousin Harry,” who was kneeling before a box of carpenter’s tools, lifted his eyes to the child’s face. “He has dared to tell my master that he lies?” he muttered.

Mrs. Blake leaped to her feet with surprising agility. Her long face began to work convulsively; her eyes rolled up till they seemed to be white and sightless. “Yes, Tweedledee,” she cried, “you have lied to me—always you have lied! Once you told me that we would go out into the world as to a

dance ; that we would take Adventure by the hand ; that I would be free—free like the wind. But has it come to pass ? Ah no ! I am forced to sit here day after day—an old woman, knitting ! I did not leave the circus for this. There I had more liberty ; there I had the kind wooden demon who told me what to do.”

“Cousin Harry” rose to his full height. “Echo,” he said menacingly, “do not speak so to Tweedledee.”

But Mrs. Blake continued unheedingly. “Yes, you have lied to me. You have taken advantage of poor ‘Echo’ who has never wished you any harm. At night you have shown him drops of blood ; before the morning they have crystallised into precious stones. Blood is precious—precious ! That is why Nature hides it so carefully beneath our skins. Each drop will turn into a garnet, or a ruby if it is rich enough. When Hector McDonald’s uncle left this morning, you whispered in my ear : ‘That man has rarest rubies flowing through his veins.’ How could you know that, Tweedledee ?”

The child frowned impatiently. “Be silent, Echo !”

“No, I will not be silent ! I am the voice and I shall speak ! You have stolen my kind little wooden demon,

and you will not give him back to me. Without him, I cannot understand you, Tweedledee. Why did you ask me to find out what size shoes McDonald wears? I am afraid for him, Tweedledee! I would not have you take a single drop of his blood—no, not if it turned into the most sparkling ruby in our treasure chest. Why is Hercules making stilts? Ah, you will not answer me! I smell blood! It is coming—coming in a torrent of precious stones. I am tired of precious stones. They are cold and sharp. They weigh me down beneath their wicked weight—like a bag full of crimson pebbles. They no longer sparkle in the sunshine of a happy thought. They glow, glow as sullen and red as the dying sunset. Because of them, I will no longer obey you, Tweedledee."

"What, you will no longer obey our master!" cried the giant. He strode over to Mrs. Blake. One of his huge hairy hands gripped her throat. "I will wring your neck, so!" he growled, tightening his grasp. "Say the word, Tweedledee, and this voice shall be silent forever."

But the child shook his small round head. "No, no, Hercules! 'Echo' still has work to do. Not yet—not yet!"

CHAPTER XXI

ONE bright Spring day in the latter part of April, Hector McDonald left the dingy little room on Thirty-fourth Street for the last time. That morning the rent had come due; and the young man had found himself in an embarrassing, penniless condition.

Nothing remained to take to the pawn-shop—nothing, with the exception of the gold headed cane that had belonged to his father. This McDonald had reserved as a last resource, hoping to raise enough money on it to pay his way out of the city. Finding himself at the end of his rope, he had determined on this course of action after careful deliberation. Surely in a suburban town he could find work more readily than in this overcrowded money-market. Besides, if he had to buckle down to commercialism, it was better to go to some place where he was unknown; where his literary ambitions and failures could not be ridiculed, and he himself be exposed to that cutting, embittering phrase: "I told you so."

On this sunshiny afternoon, he presented a strange figure to the passer-by; a figure that would scarcely have been recognised by any of his former friends.

Walking along the street with an unsteady step, the young man appeared like the shadow of his former self. Even his moustache had that despondent droop peculiar to the defeated warriors of life. It seemed trying to conceal the weary corners of his mouth. His shabby clothes were too large for him; and his derby was pushed down on his head as though to hide those hunger-haunted eyes. Only the cane in his hand—the cane with the bright golden head that glittered in the sunshine—bore the marks of worldly affluence, and, like the figures on a counterfeit bill, made what carried it appear more miserable by comparison.

McDonald had not eaten for forty-eight hours; and, feeling very dizzy, he leaned on his cane as he walked along. Everything seemed strange and distorted to the young man. The long lines of houses, on either side, drew together at the further end of the street like giants whispering secrets to one another; the passing people were walking either too slow or too fast; the trolley-cars ran independently of their tracks and threatened the curbs; and, last of all, he felt a strange inclination to burst out into song.

"Come," he said to himself, "this will never do. I must pull myself together. I've felt this way before

after dining too well; but, when I haven't dined at all, it's ridiculous. Why does a poor man drink, when to starve is so much less expensive? Ah, there's the parrot-shop at last. Don't elude me, friendly door-knob. . . . Ah! I have you—and I'll proceed to twist your neck!"

When Hector entered the bird-store, he heard the old lady's voice issuing from the room in the rear. Approaching, he found the door ajar; and saw a sight through the aperture which quite convinced him that his faculties were not to be relied upon.

There, in the middle of this tiny room, with a drooping head to escape the rafters, stood "Cousin Harry," grown at least a foot taller—or so thought Hector—while Mrs. Blake sat in one corner, an interested spectator, clapping her hands together and crying out in a shrill voice: "Well done, Hercules!"

As McDonald stood there, wild-eyed from astonishment, the giant started walking about the room; and every time he made a step forward, the young man heard a wooden thud. Finally he glanced at "Cousin Harry's" feet, and realised the truth with a sigh of relief. What he saw was not beyond the scope of reason after all.

The giant had not grown a foot taller in a single

night. No, he was merely standing on stilts—peculiar stilts that ended in little wooden feet which resembled boot-trees.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried Hector, "what's this, Mrs. Blake?"

The old lady started violently and turned towards the open door; while "Cousin Harry" wheeled about so suddenly that he almost lost his balance.

"Why these stilts?" continued McDonald. "Isn't he tall enough without them?"

"Oh, it's you!" said the old lady. "What a start you gave me! It's only 'Cousin Harry' practising."

"Practising for what?"

"Practising? Why, practising to walk on stilts of course."

"Well, you see it's this way," said "Cousin Harry," slowly and laboriously, like a stupid child repeating a lesson. "I've got a chance to join a circus and be the giant in the side-show. They want me to be eight feet tall. I'm not quite big enough to suit some of them, so I'm learning to walk on these things. They won't know the difference, when I get shoes on."

"Oh, I see," said Hector. And then turning to the old lady: "Where is 'The Silent One'? Is he going to join the circus too?"

"Who? Willie? Oh no, sir. He's been adopted. The old gentleman sent for him this morning. What a fine new home he's got! I took him over myself. What a beautiful garden your uncle has under his library window! Willie is sleeping in the library until a nursery is fixed up for him. He can smell the flowers when the window's open. It's beautiful, beautiful!"

"Who adopted him?" cried Hector. "Not Uncle Tobias?"

"The very same, sir. He called on me the other day and was so kind and pleasant-spoken. 'I like that baby, Mrs. Blake,' said he. 'Let me have him, and I'll guarantee to provide for him all his life. I'll bring him up like a gentleman, Mrs. Blake.' What could I do then? I couldn't stand in little Willie's way, even if I do love the child and hate to have him leave me."

Hector remembered the day when the old lady had stared so intently through the shop-window at the flying piece of paper and had expressed such a different attitude towards little Willie; but now he very wisely held his tongue. Anything she said at any time, he reasoned, was merely the mad impulse of the moment.

"You look sick and worn out, sir," she continued in a motherly fashion. "Won't you have some tea and toast? I was just going to make some, when you came in."

"I haven't had anything to eat in two days," said Hector, sinking down on the lounge. "I'm kind of dizzy, Mrs. Blake."

"Good Heavens! Take off those stilts, Harry, and make a fire in the stove. Why haven't you eaten anything, Mr. McDonald?"

"All my money's gone," Hector answered simply. "The last of it went Tuesday. I was on my way to the pawn-shop with this cane; but I felt too weak, and so I thought I'd drop in here and rest for a moment."

"And rest you *shall*, sir. Take off those shoes and lie down on the sofa. You'll be more comfortable there. That's the way. Take those shoes and clean them, Harry. They're not in very good shape, sir. Why did you put these nails in the sole of this one? They make a cross, don't they? That's strange!"

"Yes," said Hector, drowsily. "You see the sole was coming off—was deserting me in my time of need—so I tacked it on with a cross of nails for luck."

By this time "Cousin Harry" had taken off his stilts; and, rolling up his trousers about his enormous ankles, he proceeded to make himself useful. First he took Hector's shoes out of the room, and then coming back immediately, busied himself over the stove. Soon the kettle was steaming, and a small sirloin steak was in process of cooking. McDonald, lying back at his ease, breathed the odour of food through his nostrils and forgot the trials and tribulations of the past in an animal anticipation of the future.

Finally everything was in readiness. "Cousin Harry" pulled a small table in front of the lounge; the old lady placed on it a napkin, knife and fork, and, last of all, the steaming steak itself.

"Now, sir," said she, "you can begin." But her invitation was unnecessary, for McDonald, quite changed from his old fastidious self, literally pounced on the meat and devoured it like a hungry wolf.

"This is awfully kind of you, Mrs. Blake," he said at last, looking up from the plate on which nothing remained but a few bones and red splashes of gravy. "That steak was wonderful! You must excuse me, if I've acted like a cannibal."

"Poor boy," said the kind old lady—and there

was genuine solicitude in her eyes—"poor boy, you *were* hungry. Now you must have your tea and toast. See, they're all ready for you."

Hector, nothing loath, drank the warming beverage as though it were nectar, and devoured at least a dozen pieces of toast. Then, feeling very drowsy, he let himself fall back on the lounge and closed his eyes.

"That's right," said the old lady, "try to get a little sleep if you can. I'll tell 'Cousin Harry' not to wake you when he comes in with your shoes." With her finger to her lips, she tiptoed out of the room.

And then McDonald felt himself carried away in the swift, silent river of sleep. It came suddenly and swept him off, bearing him away to the drowsy sea of dreams. Even in a half conscious condition, he realised that this sleep was unnatural. He struggled against it weakly, but found the tide too strong for him and the shore of wakefulness too far away. It was as though a heavy black curtain had fallen before his eyes; as though he were lying beneath a mountain of soft, downy feathers. He could neither struggle nor cry out. He was helpless. Once the black curtain lifted a trifle; and it was then

that he had the strange dream, which perhaps was no dream.

He seemed to be looking at the objects in the room through half-closed eyes. There were the empty dishes on the table, the kettle on the stove, and the old clock ticking out the seconds. "Cousin Harry" was gone, but the kind old lady was here. What was she doing? Ah, she was rummaging in a box beside the window! Now she was drawing out of it a little figure—a little figure of wood. Now she was placing it on the mantelpiece. What could it be? Why, it had legs like a goat and the head of an old man! Now she was on her knees before it with outstretched arms. But why was her voice so filled with joy?

"Oh, I've found you! I've found you!" cried the old lady. "I've found my brain!"

And then a strange thing happened—even for a dream. The little figure sitting on the mantelpiece—the little wooden figure with legs like a goat and the face of an old man—spoke.

"I have your brains," it squeaked, "and you have me. Ask; and I must answer. Tweedledee has led you into strange paths since last we met, my master."

"Strange paths," echoed the old lady in a voice like a sob.

CHAPTER XXII

UNCLE TOBIAS stole into his library like a thief. It was past nine o'clock, and the room was a den of shadows. Walking on his toes to the little table in one corner, he lighted the reading-lamp and then approached the wicker baby-carriage standing a few steps from the open window. Bending down, he could just make out the black outline of a tiny round head against the snowy pillow. The eyes appeared to be closed, and the breathing was deep and regular. "He's asleep," muttered the old man; and, drawing his chair noiselessly to the casement, he sat down and rested his chin on his hand.

It was a beautiful May night. Outside, directly below the window, his tiny garden lay dreaming through the dark hours. The perfume of its sleeping breath caressed his cheek. Above, that other garden of immensity—the sky—was alive with star-flowers. They pushed their golden heads through the rich black soil on invisible stalks; and the breeze, coming from them, seemed to bring their fragrance to the world.

What were the old man's thoughts on this night? Was he happy? Who can tell? Perhaps he had conjured up another Hector McDonald when he had looked at the sleeping child. Very often our human weakness takes the form of forced affection. We lose a precious something and try to supplant it by another, driving the old love through new channels of the heart. But is it ever quite the same? Can we take back a gift from one and present it to another with all the joy of giving something new? For weeks he had been contemplating this step; for weeks he had been passing the little shop; for weeks he had seen this baby almost daily—and yet, during all that time, he had hesitated in taking something to fill his nephew's place.

But having once decided, he had acted firmly. He had talked the matter over with the sensible old woman who kept the store. He had expected trouble here—weak, womanly tears—perhaps a feigned affection for the child, calculated to open his purse. But he had been wrong. Everything had gone quite smoothly. The sensible old woman had proved to be very sensible indeed: some might have said unfeeling. No sooner had he explained to her his position in life; no sooner had he offered to adopt the child,

to make himself responsible for its upbringing, than all the objections she might have had were put aside. She had given up her nephew without a sigh, without a tear, but with perhaps just the slightest trace of an enigmatic smile about the lips.

He had sent for his new possession that morning; and it had been brought, in due course, safe and sound. A baby in the house needs thought and preparation. Uncle Tobias had neglected both. Very much to his annoyance, he had been unable to secure a nurse immediately. Luckily, his cook was familiar with children and had taken "Little Willie" under her wing. Then there was the nursery that had been neglected for so many years. The servants had been working in it all day, but it was not quite ready for its new occupant. The child was to spend the first night in the library. He had been kissed and told to go to sleep, hours ago; and yet Uncle Tobias, like a baby with a new doll, could not resist watching him as he slept.

At last the old man stirred in his chair, and, rising stiffly to his feet, tiptoed to the safe. It was a long time since he had taken the rubies out for their nightly inspection; and now, perhaps wishing to retrace his footsteps into the path of bygone habit,

he noiselessly opened the steel door and took out a small leather bag. Walking over to the reading-lamp, he heard a faint clicking as the stones rubbed against each other. His eyes lighted up with anticipation as they had used to do.

Under the shaded light, he poured the rubies on the table. They pattered down on the hard smooth surface like crimson hail. How they glittered, lying there! Each one seemed to light up a story of the past. Perhaps they had seen a bloody past. This one had, at any rate. He remembered the man who had sold it to him, the man with the brooding face and flowing robes; he remembered the little shop on the side street, the little shop of dark shadows and Eastern hangings. It was by such a man, in such a room, that such a story should be told.

All at once Uncle Tobias shook his head slightly, as though he were banishing something from his mind. His gaze wandered around the room until it finally reached the baby-carriage. Then he started suddenly with a muttered exclamation of surprise. There, sitting bolt upright, he saw a tiny form—a tiny form with a shadowy face and black beady eyes. It had risen from the pillow as silently as a well-oiled spring, and now sat staring with an unnatural

intensity at the glittering pile of blood-red stones beneath the lamp.

And Uncle Tobias, at that moment, fancied that the face of the child had changed; that he could see this change even through the shadows; and that it had grown older—years older. The tiny hands, gripping the sides of the baby-carriage, seemed thin and eager; and the eyes held something in their depths quite foreign to innocence. For an instant the two remained as motionless as statues—the old man looking at the child; the child staring at the stones. Finally Uncle Tobias, shaking off his weird fancy, broke the silence.

"You mustn't sit up like this, Tweedledee. You ought to be asleep."

The child's body relaxed; he turned his eyes toward Uncle Tobias. They were partly veiled now by black, drooping lashes. Suddenly he stretched out his arms and smiled. "I wants the pwetty stones!" he cried. "Oh please—the pwetty, pwetty stones!"

"Will you go to sleep if I let you play with them for a minute?"

"I'll go wight to sleep then."

The old man, now quite himself, smiled benignly, and, gathering the rubies into the leather bag, de-

posited them beside his tiny protégé. The child seemed delighted with his expensive playthings. Taking them up, one by one, he held them to the light, twisted them round and round in his chubby little hands, put them between his lips like cherries, and gurgled his infantile joy.

For some time Uncle Tobias stood over the baby, enjoying his play. It reminded him of other nights and of other children. Finally, almost reluctantly, he said: "Well, you've played enough, and now you must go to sleep." Taking the rubies with him, the old man returned to his seat by the table. As for the child, his obedience was of the best. Without a word of protest, he sank back on the pillow; and, a few moments later, his regular breathing showed him to be in the land of dreams.

Time passed; and the old man examined the rubies, one by one—the treasured collection of a lifetime—while through his brain past events thronged on hurrying, echoing feet, calling up a host of long forgotten faces—a host of long forgotten thoughts. Gradually the footsteps died away; the forgotten faces grew grey with mist; the distant thoughts, folding their tired wings, became shadowy and unreal. Sleep was stealing over Uncle Tobias.

Slowly the grey head sank lower and lower, till the wrinkled forehead touched the table and was still. The wan white hands lay open on the glittering heap of precious stones. A single ruby, like a drop of blood, touched the pointed beard.

It grew later still; and slowly, like a tiny ghost, a figure in white stole out of a shadow near the wall, and, creeping to the window on all fours, raised itself—then lifted its arms above its head. For a moment it stood thus, as though listening to the night; while behind it, in the silent room, the lamp-light was dying out—dying out in a fretful, flickering flame. Suddenly a moonbeam glided in, and, shuddering, touched those black, lack-lustre eyes. And then, as though this were a signal, that, which this silent little figure had been waiting for, came to pass.

Slowly, outside the window, a glittering object was pushed up from below—an object resembling a black cane with a golden head. Quickly, eager little hands seized it and pulled it in. Now other hands grasped the ledge—great, straining, hairy hands—and in a moment more the stars had vanished, wiped out by the huge body of a man. Then two forms approached Uncle Tobias, two forms complete in

contrast—the one, small and dangerous; the other, gigantic and terrible.

Now they were beside him ; now they were bending over him ; now the tiny figure, loosening his hold on the cane, handed it to the other. And if the light had been brighter, if we could have seen Tweedle-dee's face, I am sure it would have worn a ferocious yet pathetic smile.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE hour-hand on the face of the slow-ticking clock had made a complete revolution before Hector McDonald awoke. During the night, people had come and gone about him. Many times the kind old lady had stolen in noiselessly, and, drawing her chair beside the couch, had regarded the sleeping young man with a searching yet tender glance. On these occasions, her large, luminous eyes mirrored both maternal regard and genuine pity. She seemed a mother, grieving over the sick-bed of her only child.

Once, late in the night, "Cousin Harry" had stalked into the little room, carrying in his arms what appeared to be several pieces of broken wood. He had bent over the stove with his burden; and, a little later, a red, evil flame had leaped up like a bloody, silent tongue. At that moment, the giant had been outlined against the fierce light and his shadow had enveloped the sleeping figure on the couch.

Morning had come and gone; the afternoon was well advanced before McDonald awoke. Rubbing his

eyes, he sat up and stretched himself. He usually came out of sleep like a bather out of a cold plunge—refreshed and invigorated. But this time it was quite different. His head ached and his body felt as heavy as lead. Every movement required an exertion of the will. His eyes were so misty that he seemed to be looking out at the world through a fine, grey veil.

"I wonder how long I've been asleep?" he muttered, looking about him vacantly. "The sun is still up, I see."

"You've had a long, long sleep, Mr. McDonald," said the old lady's voice. She was sitting in her accustomed place with her knitting on her knee.

"But I couldn't have been sleeping so *very* long, Mrs. Blake. I didn't get here until four; and I see by your clock that it's only six."

"It was yesterday that you came, sir."

"What! And I've been sleeping all that time?"

"Exactly. You were very tired."

"I must have been! I never slept as long as that before! Why didn't you wake me up? I must have bothered you, lying here."

"Bothered me? Oh *no*, sir," said the old lady with a bright smile. "You were no more bother to me than

a corpse—and *they're* no bother to me, Mr. McDonald. . . . Except when they bleed," she added in an undertone; and her expressive face darkened.

The young man shivered involuntarily. His nerves were throbbing to the winds of fancy. And there was something in Mrs. Blake's eyes, something in her voice, something in the way she held her head, that affected McDonald more than any of her wildest mental-wanderings had ever done. He longed to get out into the street and let the Spring breeze blow the clouds out of his brain; to leave this tiny room and this mad-woman—this mad-woman with her white, rustling hair and nervous, gliding fingers.

"Where are my shoes, Mrs. Blake?" he asked. "I must go. There are several things that I've got to do."

"So you're in a hurry?" she said, rising to her feet. "Isn't it strange that *you* should be in a hurry?" She looked at him for a moment in astonishment, and then repeated in almost a whisper: "Isn't it strange that *he* should be in a hurry?"

"You see I've got several things to do," said the young man quickly, looking about him on all sides. "Can you find my shoes for me, Mrs. Blake?"

The kind old lady walked out of the room and returned a moment later with McDonald's shoes. They had been brushed and polished. As she handed them to the young man, her face was transformed into a mask of sorrow. Bright tears gathered in her eyes.

"And why do you want *these* shoes?" she asked softly.

"Because they're mine," said Hector wearily. "It's a custom to wear shoes these days, Mrs. Blake; and we're all creatures of custom, you know."

"But *these* shoes!" said the kind old lady, shaking her head at him, while a tear trickled down her long, slender nose. "*These black, treacherous shoes!*"

At another time Hector might have burst out laughing; but now, in his nervous state of depression, the atmosphere of the tiny room seemed charged with insanity. He felt that if he took a long breath, madness might enter with it; that he might soon be repeating with her: "These shoes, these shoes, these black treacherous shoes!" He must leave here immediately.

Hastily putting on his shoes, he started for the door. The old lady followed him, muttering in a

broken voice: "Those shoes, those black treacherous shoes!"

Before leaving the bird-store, the young man turned with outstretched hand. The memory of Mrs. Blake's kindnesses for a moment overcame the fanciful terrors in his mind. He blushed for his brusqueness.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Blake," he said. "Perhaps it will be a good many days before you see me again. I'm going to leave the city to-morrow. I'm bound for the country, where everything is bright and happy, where the wind plays through the meadows—your friend, the wind, Mrs. Blake."

"And you would like to play with the wind?" cried the old lady, clasping her hands together and peering at him through tear-dimmed eyes. "You would like to be gay and free like that—so free, like the wind? Dancing before it always, over the meadow bright with flowers, over the hedges green and gold, over the brook that sings in the sunlight, over the river so pale from the moon—on, on, always on, to the Rest at the end of the world? Oh, have pity on me! I'm so sad, so very sad!" And burying her face in her slender hands, she sobbed as though her heart would break.

McDonald, not knowing quite what to do, leaned forward and patted her reassuringly on the shoulder. At that very moment, the fast waning day shot one of her departing arrows through the window and straight into the young man's face. His forehead was stained a vivid crimson; and the old lady, seeing it between her trembling fingers, dropped her hands to her throat.

"Wipe it off!" she screamed. "Wipe it off, before the people see! It's Tweedledee who's done this. Wipe it off!" And drawing a handkerchief from her pocket, she rubbed feverishly at the splash of crimson sunlight, muttering between pale, trembling lips: "Wipe it off! It's Tweedledee's mark, so wipe it off!"

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Hector McDonald left the bird-store, he was still in a kind of mental stupor. The dregs of his prolonged, unnatural sleep were with him yet, and the misty veil still hung before his eyes.

Perhaps it was his mental state, or perhaps it was his anxiety to leave the mad, old woman, that had made him quite forget his one means of procuring money—the heavy gold-headed cane.

At last he remembered it, and stopped short. He half turned about as though to retrace his footsteps, but as he stood there, hesitating, all his fanciful fears returned and his nerves began to throb. He felt that in his present state of mind it would be impossible to return. He must wait until nature dusted the cobwebs from his brain. It would be horrible for him to go back now—to look into those large, wandering eyes, at that white, nervous face, at those feverish, moving lips—to hear that insane voice whispering in his ear, "Wipe it off, I say; wipe it off! It's Tweedledee's mark, so wipe it off!" No, that was more than he could do at present. Besides,

the cane would be safe where it was—quite safe. He would say good-bye to Dorothy, and afterwards he would call for it. Then his nerves would be quieted.

McDonald continued up the street; and gradually, as he walked along, his brain grew clearer. The May breezes blew the mist out of his eyes, and he could think with his usual clearness. Fixing his eyes on the future, the buoyancy of his nature reasserted itself; the young man soon began to build air-castles.

An ordinary house rarely meets the demands of a dreamer, especially a ragged dreamer, and thus we have the air-castle—an abode constructed by Optimism to contain everything or nothing—a floating dream-dwelling resting on a cloud—a drifting house-boat on the sea of immensity.

So engrossed was Hector in his thoughts that he saw nothing about him. The hurrying people might just as well have been so many ghosts. There was a policeman standing on one corner who seemed interested in the young man. Perhaps if he had seen this policeman's face—perhaps if he had glanced at that open mouth, at those staring eyes, at the bristling astonishment depicted by that white moustache—he would have stopped and spoken to him, instead of hurrying on. As McDonald walked by, this officer,

stretching out a detaining hand, moistened his lips as though about to speak and then apparently thought better of it.

A moment later, a short, fat man stepped up to the policeman and whispered something in his ear. "I tell you it *is*," he whispered fiercely. "I *know* it is."

But Hector saw nothing of this. He pursued his way oblivious to everything about him; and it was not until he had reached the Arlington house, mounted the stoop and rung the bell, that he even glanced back. In the distance, a block away, he noticed two figures approaching—a short, stout figure; the other, tall and dressed in blue.

The door was opened by none other than Dorothy. She stood framed in the shadow of the hallway—a white statue of a woman, with dark, troubled eyes.

"I saw you coming, so I answered the door myself," she said in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "Something told me that you were coming. Follow me into the library. There's nobody there."

As she spoke, she held the door open till the young man entered; and then, closing it behind him with a quick nervous motion of her fingers, she slipped the bolt in place. McDonald, following her into the library, felt the cobwebs once more gathering in his

brain. His nerves commenced to jangle all out of tune. What had happened to the world, he wondered wearily? Everything seemed unnatural to-day. Even Dorothy had changed. Why was her face as white as chalk? Why did she look at him so? Surely there was terror and repulsion in her eyes! And why was her voice so strange and low, as though she were afraid of waking somebody who slept? Had everybody gone mad, or was *he* mad? Perhaps he was only sick. Yet why had she bolted the door? He had seen her do it with his own eyes; and it was never bolted till night.

Puzzled, and conscious of a growing fanciful fear, McDonald found himself in the library. The room was in semi-darkness, but the windows were brightened up as though the city were on fire. Far away, over the ragged rooftops, the sky was a fading crimson set with inky clouds. The girl's head and shoulders were outlined against it for a moment; and then—like the curtain at the theatre—the shade descended, shutting out the scene. Now the room was bathed in brightness. She had touched the electric button on the wall.

McDonald looked at Dorothy intently. At first he had thought that perhaps the fading daylight was

responsible for her pallor; but now he saw that her face was even whiter in this bright light. About the eyes were dark circles which accentuated the ghastly hue of her cheeks.

The young man took a hasty step towards her. "Dorothy," he cried, "are you sick? What has happened to you?" He tried to take her hand.

But, as he stepped forward, she shrank back against the wall. "Don't touch me," she cried, "don't touch me! There's blood on your hand!"

Involuntarily McDonald looked at his outstretched hand, and then into the girl's troubled eyes. "There's nothing there," he said dully. "What's the matter, Dorothy?"

"What's the matter!" she repeated. "How can you ask me that? You remember what you told me months ago? I thought you were joking then. What a fool I was! But how dare you come here? Aren't you afraid of anything in the world? Last night you were a murderer; and to-day you come to me. But I'm not afraid of you! I should open the window and cry for help! I should not shield you! Did you think of that? Then why do you come to me?"

The young man put both hands to his head. The room seemed to be revolving slowly. "I don't under-

stand," he muttered. "You see I'm not very well to-day, Dorothy."

"You don't understand?" said the girl. "Surely there's nothing so difficult to understand in what I say. I repeat, why should you come to me? Because you confided in me that time, did you think I took you literally? When you said that you must become a murderer to be famous, did you think that I believed you *would* become a murderer? When you spoke of strangling little Tommy and knocking your uncle's brains out, did you imagine that I thought you would *actually* do these things? You may be mad, but you cannot be as mad as that! Why, even when I found Tommy nearly dead, I didn't think for an instant that *you* had done it. It was too horrible to believe! But now, when your uncle lies murdered in his house, when the whole world knows that it was your hand that struck him down, I can no longer blind myself to the truth."

"What!" cried Hector in astonishment. "Is Uncle Tobias dead?"

"*You* should know that," said Dorothy coldly. "You murdered him last night."

For a moment the clouds of bewilderment in McDonald's brain parted, and a glimmer of light

sifted through. He caught at the garment of flying truth with a trembling hand. "So they think that I murdered Uncle Tobias?" he said. "Do you think so too, Dorothy?"

And then, for the first time, the girl's voice trembled. She looked into his eyes with astonishment; and, seeing truth mirrored there, her own flashed with the light of hope.

"What else could I think, Hector?" she asked. "If you hadn't told me what you did that day, I wouldn't have believed this for an instant—not even after what the paper says. But you see, what you told me has come to pass."

"And what does the paper say?"

"Here it is," she said. Walking over to the library table, she picked up an evening journal and handed it to the young man. In these last few moments her face had changed. It had been calm, but now it was alive with struggling emotion.

Hector McDonald took the paper, and bent over it. There, staring him in the face, was his own picture—a picture that had been taken two years ago—and under it, in big black print, was his full name. His eyes wandered to the top of the page, and he began reading the article aloud:

"NEPHEW IS SUSPECTED IN GRAHAM MURDER

"When Mr. Tobias Graham was found murdered in his library this morning, the police were immediately notified. They succeeded in obtaining several clues which involve his nephew in the crime. They found the safe open, and—"

But just at this moment, there came a violent ringing of the doorbell which made the young man look up with a start. Dorothy tiptoed over to the window, and, drawing the shade towards her, peered out through the aperture.

"Oh, Hector," she cried, turning towards him, "it's a policeman! What can I do? What shall I do?"

He walked up to her and put his arm about her waist. "Don't worry, Dorothy," he said. "I tell you that it's all right. I can prove that I had nothing to do with this. I have witnesses to prove it. I want you to believe me, that's all."

"But what shall I do?" she cried, her strength now quite gone. "What shall I do? They've come to get you."

"Let them take me, Dorothy. It won't be for long —just as long as I want, that's all. I have witnesses to prove that I was asleep when this murder was

committed. Let them in, dear. Be brave, and let them in."

As Dorothy walked towards the door, McDonald stood waiting near the window. And there was something in the set of his shoulders, something in the way he held his head, that was like the young man of other, happier days. Never had he appeared more imposing than at that moment. It was as though a new man had been created. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes were shining. He seemed to be looking into the face of a glorious future. "It's come at last," he muttered to himself, "it's come at last! And now I'll play *my* hunch for all it's worth."

CHAPTER XXV

Two weeks after the events recorded in the previous chapter, McDonald sat alone in his cell, writing busily at a small ink-stained table. His sojourn in the Tombs had changed his appearance for the better. He seemed to have thrived on prison fare. His hollow cheeks had filled out; the dark rings about his eyes had disappeared; and his entire person pulsed with new life.

But perhaps the greatest change of all was in the young man's dress. Gone were the ragged coat and baggy trousers, the soiled collar and worn shoes; and, in their place, one beheld the fashionable raiment of that other McDonald, that McDonald who had once been the pride of his tailor's heart.

And what had caused this sudden transformation? What had made this withered bud open to the renewal of beautiful, joyous youth? Money had accomplished the miracle. Money—which Hector had always despised—waving her golden wand, had cried out: “Presto! Change!” and the impossible had become a reality. McDonald, in these two weeks, had grown to be a celebrity.

And where did this money come from? Ah, that was the beauty of it! He had pried it out of the fists of the magazine monarchs, as long ago he had foretold, and had given them for it his rejected work—at a price! Yes, now they came for his stories; and it was “pay in advance” with Hector during these days. He told them, chuckling inwardly, that perhaps in a month or so he might go to the electric chair and then what good could money do him? He must have it now or not at all.

And so they had paid, grudgingly perhaps; but still they had paid him just the price he asked. And why should they not? His name was ringing through the world. Every newspaper had column articles about him. His picture was examined daily by millions of curious eyes.

He read about himself, enjoying it all with the zest of a child. They called him, in the newspapers, “the cold-blooded young murderer;” they dwelt on his personal appearance; they hinted that he was a follower in the philosophic path of Nietzsche—that he believed he was only securing his rights by murdering his uncle, as the weak should always be crushed by the strong; they designated him “the mad young genius,” who murdered people so that he

might describe more vividly by his fertile pen the actual sensations in the brain of the murderer; they alluded to his strange silence when he had been examined—prophesying that he would confess everything at his trial. . . . And McDonald laughed to himself at all this, and encouraged them.

He had many interviews with reporters—and at these times he dressed himself with the greatest care—interviews in which he was witty, philosophic, and altogether bewildering. He had pet phrases which he used, and enjoyed reading afterwards—pet phrases such as “Why should an uncle stand in the way of the world?” “True greatness is a violent sacrifice of others.” “How many relatives would Napoleon have served up to the English guns, if by this means he could have been assured of victory at Waterloo?” “If one must live, is it not better to butcher an uncle for one’s daily bread than to butcher literature?” After an hour or so spent in this manner, the reporters had invariably hurried back to their papers, resolved to make the most of the prisoner’s frankness. Consequently he had sold more and more stories,—and his name had grown up like a mushroom in a single night.

Lawyers had come to him, offering to handle his

case; but he had turned them all away, saying with an air of insufferable egotism, that he was quite competent to take care of himself. That very morning, his old friend, James Evans, had come and had been very angry.

"Do you realise, Hector," he had said, "that it's only three weeks now till your trial? Do you want to throw your life away without a fight? You may be guilty, as those fool interviews in the papers show; but let me see if I can't do something for you at any rate."

And then McDonald had told everything to his friend. He had nothing more to fear by unburdening his mind. His stories had been accepted, and his name was famous. All that now lay before him was his final triumph at the trial; and Jim should share with him in this triumph.

"And so you see," he had concluded. "I have witnesses—two witnesses. Of course Mrs. Blake is a trifle insane, but 'Cousin Harry' is all right. He's stupid and sensible enough to make a good witness."

"And you've never said a word to any one about this, Hector?"

"Not a soul. Why, man, this thing has made me famous. I've sold a dozen stories in the last week."

"Have you seen your witnesses since you've been here?"

"No. Why should I? They live at the bird-store. You can find them any time."

"And they haven't called on you, or written you? They've given no interviews to the papers? They've kept entirely quiet?"

"Yes. *That* is peculiar, isn't it? You know I never thought of it before. You see, I've been so busy writing."

"Busy! Good Lord, man! Do you realise that your life is hanging by a thread? How could you be such a fool? I'd have been here two weeks ago, if I hadn't thought you'd engaged some other lawyer. Now I'm off."

"Where to, Jim? To look for my witnesses?"

"Yes, to look for them. You'd better pray, Hector. I advise you to."

"Nonsense! You'll find them at the bird-store all right."

Then the thin, young lawyer, seizing his hat with a nervous hand, had vanished, leaving Hector to his thoughts. For some time McDonald had pondered over what his friend had said. Vague misgivings for the future had begun to creep into his mind.

"It's no use worrying," he had told himself finally. "He's bound to find them. But if the kind old lady weren't quite so mad and 'Cousin Harry' were a little brighter, it would suit me just as well."

And then, shaking his head as though to rid himself of an unpleasant thought, the young man had seated himself at his desk and started writing to Dorothy. She, at least, after that first moment, had not believed him guilty. She had not even asked for proofs. Daily he had received a note from her, sometimes an anxious note; but he had always answered them so reassuringly, so gaily—telling her that he could open his prison door whenever he wished—that gradually she had grown to believe in his absolute safety.

At last Hector finished the letter, and signed his name. Rising to his feet, he stretched himself and yawned. "It's time Jim was back," he muttered. "It couldn't have taken him all this time to go up and see them. I wonder if he's having them make affidavits. There's an energetic fellow for you!"

He crossed the room leisurely, and picked up an old copy of a New York paper—the one in fact that Dorothy had handed him two weeks before. On the first page was the article which he had started to read

when he had been so suddenly interrupted by the ringing of the bell. For the fifth or sixth time since then, the young man began to peruse the wrinkled sheet.

“NEPHEW IS SUSPECTED IN GRAHAM MURDER”

“When Mr. Tobias Graham was found murdered in his library this morning, the police were immediately notified. They succeeded in obtaining several clues which involve his nephew in the crime. They found the safe open, and the old man lying on the floor with his head in a pool of blood.”

“The poor old chap!” murmured Hector. “I wish I could feel more cut up about his death than I do.”

“It is believed that the police may have found the weapon that crushed the murdered man’s skull. At any rate, they discovered footprints in the garden directly beneath the library window. An active man might very well have climbed the wall circling the garden, crossed the yard on the cement path; and, standing beneath the casement just long enough to leave his footprints, have leaped up, seized the window-ledge and pulled himself in. What adds horror to the crime, is the fact that Mr. Graham had adopted a little boy, who, while this murder was being committed, was sleeping the sleep of childish innocence in this room.”

“I wonder what became of ‘The Silent One’,” muttered Hector, glancing up from the paper. “I suppose Mrs. Blake had to take him back. Ah, this must be Jim at last!”

Footsteps could be heard in the prison corridor. Soon afterwards the heavy iron door swung open; and James Evans, with his enigmatic eyeglasses fixed on his bony nose, stepped in and confronted the young man.

"Well, did you find them, Jim?" cried Hector, his heart beginning to beat faster than was its wont. "I suppose you've got all their affidavits made out by this time?"

No answer from the tall figure by the door.

"Well, why don't you speak? To be quite candid, I was growing a trifle nervous. Are they outside, waiting to see me?"

There was another silence—an unendurable silence. McDonald felt a clammy sweat breaking out on his forehead. His knees began to tremble.

"For God's sake, Jim, speak!" he cried. "What are you trying to do? Frighten me to death?"

Then the tall young man spoke. And every time he moved his lips, it seemed to McDonald as though a tiny figure of fear leaped out from between them. A few hours ago he had felt quite safe, quite confident that he was master of his own destiny; and now, in an instant, he was over his head and struggling in an unknown, perilous sea.

"Hector," said the lawyer in a calm collected voice, "I want to tell you that I think you are innocent, and that I'm going to fight right beside you in this. Now you want to brace up, for here's the bad news : Those witnesses have disappeared."

"What?" gasped Hector. "They're not in the bird-store? Neither the old lady nor 'Cousin Harry'? Why, they must be there! You've made a mistake, Jim!"

"They haven't been there in two weeks," said Evans grimly. "I've seen the landlord. They cleared out, bag and baggage, leaving the parrots in payment for two months' rent. I guess they were two shady characters—your kind old lady and 'Cousin Harry.' It's a wonder they didn't leave the child behind them too ; but they didn't. The old woman called at your uncle's house the very day after the murder, and asked for it. The butler recognised her, and gave her the child without questioning her. That seems to have been the last time she was seen in the city."

"But where could they have gone to?" cried McDonald despairingly. "Why should they go away like this?"

"Didn't want to step up on the witness stand, I

imagine. Characters too shady, perhaps. Did they have anything against you?"

"No, Mrs. Blake and I were the best of friends."

"And 'Cousin Harry'?"

"I only saw him occasionally. He didn't have anything against me, though."

"Well, Hector," said the lawyer, stepping forward and putting his hand on the young man's shoulder, "we've got to find those witnesses somehow. We'll need them at the trial. You've been ruining your case ever since you've been here by those fool interviews with reporters; and the prosecuting attorney will have something up his sleeve. We must be ready for anything. We may need that hunch of mine that's coming, after all."

CHAPTER XXVI

DOROTHY ARLINGTON descended the staircase and entered the living-room. Here she found a tall, thin young man awaiting her—a young man with a cadaverous face and hollows under his cheek-bones—a young man with flashing eyeglasses firmly fixed on a long, bony nose.

"This is Mr. Evans, isn't it?" she asked, advancing towards him.

"Yes, Miss Arlington." He rose to his feet and took her proffered hand. "Hector asked me to call. He said that you were interested."

"Interested!" cried Dorothy with a catch in her voice. "I'm more than that."

"So I see. But I must hurry. My time is limited."

"Is there anything new?" she asked, sinking into a chair.

"Perhaps you didn't hear of what happened in court this morning?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, I felt it coming for a long time. You see I know quite a little about the prosecuting attorney.

He's got a reputation for springing surprises. He likes to keep his cards hidden until the last moment, and then throw them down and rake in the pot. Dramatic situations are his specialty."

"Yes."

"So, knowing this about the man, I felt there must be something up his sleeve. This afternoon he brought it out. You remember that cane Hector had —the one his father left him?"

"A gold-headed cane? Yes, I remember."

"This morning the prosecuting attorney brought it out—or what was left of it, for it was broken in two pieces. He had several witnesses to swear to its identity, including Mr. Graham's butler, John. Well, to make a long story short, it was found the morning after the murder beside the dead man; and its head, dented and covered with dry blood, corresponded exactly with the wound at the back of the old man's scalp. Undoubtedly it was the weapon used."

"Yes?" said Dorothy, gripping the arms of her chair and turning deathly white.

"Yes," continued the lawyer bitterly; "and that isn't all. That was only exhibit number one. Exhibit number two was soon to follow. I had noticed a large wooden box beside this legal conjurer, but I

couldn't imagine what it was for. I was soon to learn. After he had made his point with the cane, he opened this box and brought out of it a piece of sod that had been taken from Mr. Graham's garden, directly beneath the library window. Tiny blades of grass had just begun to grow on it; and the rain had made it so soft on the afternoon before the murder that it had taken the impression of a human foot as though it were heated wax. Evidently it had been removed the following morning and kept in cold storage till it was frozen into a permanent shape. Next the prosecuting attorney brought out one of Hector's old shoes, and it fitted the footprint exactly. Several nails had been driven into the sole in the shape of a cross; and you could see in the footprint the slight indentations their projecting heads had made. You see, Miss Arlington, what kind of a man we are fighting—the kind of man who gives illustrated lectures to his jury."

"But you still think he's innocent, don't you, Mr. Evans?"

"Oh yes, *I* think he's innocent; but that won't do him any good. We've got to make the jury think that he's innocent. All reason and common sense

seem to be against him. If I didn't know Hector so well, if I didn't know that he was as incapable of committing a crime like this as some little child in a baby-carriage, I wouldn't think that he was innocent, either. I won't disguise anything from you, Miss Arlington; I tell you frankly, that if something doesn't turn up, he's got very little chance of being acquitted. We must look at it the way the world does. Here's a young man arrested for a crime. Does he deny his guilt? No. Does he assert his innocence? No. He simply says nothing when he is examined. Later, he has interviews with reporters and encourages them to believe that he is really a murderer. His uncle is standing between him and a large fortune, and his uncle is murdered. Hector's cane is found beside the body. The safe is open and his uncle's rubies are gone. He is the only one who knows the combination of this safe. Lastly, Hector's footprints are found in the garden directly beneath the open window. Very strong circumstantial evidence, I should say. And now what has he to offer on his side? After waiting two weeks, he tries to prove an alibi. He says that he was at a certain bird-store in the city on that night. He names wit-

nesses, who, he says, can prove it. But where are they? They have disappeared; and there is no one to prove anything for him."

"But isn't it possible to find these witnesses?" cried Dorothy.

"I have tried, and I can say that it doesn't seem possible. Why, they've had almost a month's start. Very likely they're in China by now. A tall man, an old woman, and a baby—it's like looking for three needles in a hundred haystacks. And yet I've got a hunch that if we could find them, it would clear up this whole case. I believe they know more about it than any one else. But I must hurry off, Miss Arlington. Hector told me to give you his love. He's bearing up wonderfully."

"And don't you think there's any hope?" asked Dorothy. "You know, Mr. Evans, that I thought him guilty myself until after I had seen and talked with him. But how could anybody look into his eyes and think so?"

"Juries are not generally composed of physiognomists," said the young lawyer grimly. "Facts are what they want. But there must be hope, even if it's only a hunch. I still believe in God, Miss Arlington."

For some time after Evans had taken his de-

parture, Dorothy sat bolt upright in her chair, staring at the rain which splashed against the window. She could see a mist descending, that, like a shroud, seemed enveloping the city. It was as though the grey storm-clouds were sailing so close to the earth that their wet, weary wings brushed against it in passing. Far away, over the rooftops was a shadowy church-spire. Like a finger, it seemed trying to point out God.

But why was He so far away—so swallowed up in the gloomy caverns of space? Surely here was work for Him to do—a miracle to be accomplished. Now was the time to open the prison gates; now was the time to save the innocent and punish the guilty. But perhaps He was taking a holiday up there. Perhaps He was unwilling to come out into the wet. After all, what difference could it make to Him if some of His dolls lost their paint—if some of their bright colouring were washed away by tears?

“I must be brave,” said Dorothy; but, as she said it, her eyes began to fill. Then, quite suddenly, her overstrained nerves gave way and she burst out into unrestrained weeping. And she was still crying when Arlington found her; she was still crying when he took her in his powerful arms and whispered to her

as though she were a little child, while through his breast the old, old words were echoing: "The Lord hath given to the undeserving, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

"But she at least is not undeserving," he muttered, "and so have pity on her, O Lord."

"I must go to the trial to-morrow, father," she said at last. "Hector needs me. You'll let me go, won't you?"

And then this strange, transformed man hesitated for a moment. When he answered, his voice was trembling with emotion. "Yes, Dorothy, you may go," he said. "You may go; and I'll go with you, dear."

For several moments there was silence in the room. The mist seemed to grow thicker till it enveloped the city like a grey blanket of shadow. At times the distant church spire was lost in it, only to appear again with startling distinctness. At other times its highest extremity alone disappeared and reappeared, as though the finger were beckoning to God. Perhaps He saw it. Who can tell?

CHAPTER XXVII

HECTOR McDONALD sat alone in his cell, staring blankly at the wall. He still wore his recently purchased finery; but, alas, everything about him suggested the gorgeous peacock that has just been caught in a thunderstorm. His feathers were of the finest, but unfortunately they were drooping. And it is no wonder that this four-in-hand is carelessly tied, that these trousers need pressing, that this coat is badly wrinkled. McDonald, during these last few days, has gone through a legal mill which grinds very small indeed.

It was now six o'clock; and all night long the young man had been walking about his cell like some kind of imprisoned animal. At one moment, he had been cold and shivering; at the next, hot and bathed in perspiration. In the dark hours, he had longed for the coming of day; and now that the grey light was sifting in through the barred windows, he felt that another enemy was here.

For the last few nights sleep had deserted him. It seemed as though—now that his body was impris-

oned and in a state of inactivity—his mind had become doubly active. It refused to be bound by the shackles of sleep ; and, when it was taken off its guard for a moment, it lived on in the form of horrible dreams. And finally, when he was alone in his cell, his mind seemed to leave his body altogether, and, opening the prison door, fly out into the world.

It was at the Arlingtons' house with Dorothy, weeping with her as it saw the loneliness of the advancing years ; it was with the jury, arguing with them, pleading with them, persuading them that he had told the truth ; it was pursuing, now by land and now by sea, three flying forms that never turned their faces when he called, that never answered his agonised appeal.

It leaped backwards and forwards over the rope of time. Now it was a child beside its mother's knee ; now it was a grown man with a familiar face, walking towards a strange and terrible chair. Sometimes, from the outer world, it peered through the prison bars and pitied what it saw within. This healthy young body that was made for the sunshine, these muscles, the wonderful mechanism of the human machine—all to be sacrificed ; to be led like a sheep to



Scene from the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production "The Unholy Three," starring Lon Chaney.

the butcher, and then to be sacrificed. Oh, the pity of it—the pity of it!

Sometimes it was in the court-room, listening to the testimony with straining ears. How distinctly it saw every face in this jury—every face in this jury, that held in its hands life or death. There was the prosecuting attorney—a dark little man of finicky habits who dusted his papers with a monogrammed handkerchief. How it was fascinated by his every word, his every gesture! It had learned to call him:

“The Man of Many Miracles” for it had seen him prove that poor Hector McDonald’s shoe fitted a murderer’s footprint and that poor Hector McDonald’s cane had struck the old man down. After this, it watched the dark little man with the feeling of watching something supernaturally evil.

But McDonald’s body for days had seemed dead. When he ate, it was mechanically; when he walked about his cell, he felt nothing under his feet—just as if he were walking on air. Nothing that he did seemed in any way premeditated. Occasionally he would find a pencil in his hand; and, without the slightest idea as to where it had come from, his fingers would open and it would fall to the floor.

At other times, passing the looking-glass, he would see a vaguely familiar face with a gaping stupid mouth and round astonished eyes.

Now, on the morning of the last day—the deciding day of the trial—he sat, as unnaturally as a clothes-dummy, staring moodily before him. His imagination had leaped forward through the weary hours and was in the prisoner's dock, waiting for the jury to hand in their verdict.

There was the prosecuting attorney, rubbing his hands together in a pleased way and whispering from time to time to a stenographer; there was the judge, who would soon be pronouncing sentence—a large-featured old man with tight, compressed lips; and lastly, there was Dorothy's face, standing out from the multitude of others as though it were painted in fire. Ah, the door is opening! It is coming at last! This horrible suspense is drawing to a close. The foreman of the jury is approaching. How solemn his face looks! His lips are moving. He is speaking. My God! what is this?

But at that moment the cell door opened; and Hector McDonald's mind came back to his body with a jerk. "Who can it be?" he muttered. "It's too early for Jim. He won't get here till nine."

In this the young man was mistaken. It proved to be his legal adviser; and, at the first glance, Hector realised that something had changed the lawyer's expression since he had seen him last. Those shoulders, which had been drooping, had straightened over night; those thin lips, which had been sagging at the corners, now were drawn into two straight crimson lines of determination; those eyeglasses, which had been dull and misty, were flashing with rejuvenated zeal.

"What's happened, Jim?" cried Hector with a glimmer of hope in his voice. "You haven't found the witnesses?"

"No, it isn't that, Hector."

"What is it, then?"

"It may be something, or it may be nothing. And yet—do you remember my telling you about that hunch which was coming into my life some day?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think it's come. I can feel the psychological moment stirring within me."

"For Heaven's sake, speak out! What is it?"

"It may have been written by some fanatic. I can't see what can come out of it; and yet I've got a feeling that something will."

"Now look here, Jim," cried McDonald, drops of perspiration standing on his forehead, "I've stood just about as much of this suspense as I'm going to. Tell me everything, and be quick about it."

"Well, Hector," said the young lawyer, approaching his client and handing him a slip of paper, "I got this letter in my mail this morning. You read it."

McDonald held the piece of paper before his face with a hand that trembled. Finally he smoothed it out carefully over the arm of his chair. It was evidently a sheet torn out of a note-book. It was enclosed in a stamped envelope and directed to: "Mr. Hector McDonald's Lawyer." Under the address was written the word: "Personal." Let us look over his shoulder and read it with him.

"Mr. Hector McDonald's Lawyer,

"DEAR SIR: That young man is innocent; and you can prove it in court to-morrow if you will follow these directions. You must believe in God in the first place, and in me in the second place. Now this is what you must do: When you get up to plead for his life, don't say a single word aloud—just whisper the Lord's Prayer to yourself, so that your lips move. Do this, and God's voice shall be given to you. And when the voice comes, do not stop praying for an instant. If you do, the voice shall be taken away from you. I would say more, but I am afraid of Tweedledee. He suspects me, since I found my brain. If he knew what I was doing, he would have Hercules strangle me. What can the

voice accomplish without the body and the brain? But I can't let Mr. McDonald be shut in, away from the wind and the sunshine. He loves them so.

Respectfully,
"ECHO."

"Somebody quite insane must have written this," said Hector, finally. "The last of it sounds like my old friend, Mrs. Blake."

"So I thought," said Evans. "And what do you think I did? Before I came here, I consulted a hand-writing expert that I know. Routed him out of bed and made him give me his opinion of it. He prides himself on being able to tell the difference between a man's and a woman's writing at a glance. Well, he knocked my theory on the head. He said that undoubtedly a man had written this. Of course he may be wrong."

"But what are you going to do? You're not going to follow this absurd advice and mutter the Lord's Prayer, are you?"

"That's exactly what I *am* going to do," said Evans solemnly. "It's a hunch, and I'm going to act on it. We can't lose anything. We've got no case as it stands."

"But what could possibly come out of it?"

"How should I know? I'm going to do it, just

the same. Perhaps my handwriting expert was all wrong, and Mrs. Blake did actually write this letter. If she did, she might show up in court to hear me say the Lord's Prayer. You can be on the watch for her. She'd be able to help our case. Why, honestly, Hector, if I had a hunch to stand on my head during this trial, I'd do it. This is no case for common sense —this case of yours. It calls for a miracle, or nothing."

"Miracles don't happen these days," said McDonald with a sad smile.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE sun shone brightly through the window in two steady streams of light. It touched the white hair of the judge; it illuminated the dark figure of the prosecuting attorney; it fell on Evans' face, reflecting a little patch of brightness on either cheek; and, last of all, it rested in a yellow pool at the prisoner's feet.

Further back in the court-room, the people sat in shadow. They were as silent as the audience in a theatre, when the curtain has just been rung up for the last act. Among all these faces, two alone stood out with startling prominence. The others were seekers after sensation. They had come here to be amused, to be excited, to have their curiosity rewarded. But there was something in that girl's white face, something in that old man's wandering eyes, that manifested a different feeling—perhaps one of the tragedies of life.

In the rear of the room, where his face was lost in shadow, sat another figure that deserves a passing glance—a nervous figure with large, luminous eyes.

From time to time this man moistened his lips, and, glancing about him on all sides like some hunted animal, looked down at the little note-book which lay open on his knee.

Now the prosecuting attorney rose to his feet and began to address the jury in a high, clear voice —a voice that carried the weight of assured victory in every tone. He spoke like a schoolmaster explaining to his pupils some comparatively simple problem; and they listened to him intently, for he was known even to them as "The Man of Many Miracles."

"Gentlemen of the Jury: I am now going to sum up the evidence for the State; I am going to close up every loophole that might offer an escape from justice; I am going to refresh your memory of what I have already proved to you.

"The accused, Mr. Hector McDonald, is the only relative of the deceased Mr. Graham. He has lived with his uncle since he was six years old, and only left him last fall. He was naturally familiar with the house; and the butler, John McCawley, has testified that he knew the combination of the safe and has opened it for his uncle in McCawley's presence. Besides uncle and nephew, no one has been found

who knew this combination. As you know, the door of that safe was open on the morning after the murder. That is point number one.

“Gentlemen of the Jury: The accused, being Mr. Graham’s only relative, was therefore his natural heir. A year previous to the crime, he had an altercation with his uncle after which he was ordered out of the house. Since then he has led a life of poverty. Now, on the very afternoon before the murder, Mr. Graham had adopted a child and had had that child brought into his house. It is believed that Mr. Graham intended making his will—a will perhaps in favour of this child. What effect might this have on the accused? That is point number two.

“Gentlemen of the Jury: On the morning after the murder, the prisoner’s cane was found beside Mr. Graham’s body. You have all seen that cane. It has been identified as belonging to the accused; and has been proved by experts to have been the weapon used in committing the crime. That is point number three.

“Gentlemen of the Jury: Footprints were found in Mr. Graham’s garden, directly beneath the library window. These footprints were made on the night of the murder. Upon examination, the prisoner’s

shoes were found to exactly correspond with these footprints—even down to the smallest detail. That is point number four.

“Gentlemen of the Jury: When the accused was arrested and examined, he remained silent. He did not deny his guilt. On the contrary, when he was interviewed by reporters, he was heard to let fall such incriminating phrases as these: ‘Why should an uncle stand in the way of the world?’ ‘How many uncles would Napoleon have served up to the English guns, if by this means he could have been assured the victory at Waterloo?’ ‘It is better to butcher an uncle for one’s daily bread than to butcher literature.’ Would an innocent man have made such remarks as these? That is point number five.

“Gentlemen of the Jury: Since the accused has secured the services of a legal adviser, he has been attempting to clear himself of this charge. But what kind of a defence does the accused put up? He tells us that on the night of May fifteenth—the date of the murder—he was at a certain bird-store in the city; that he was sleeping there while the crime was being committed. We ask for proof; and he tells us that there are two witnesses who can swear to this

statement, but that unfortunately they have disappeared. That is point number six.

"Gentlemen of the Jury: This case rests in your hands. The accused, in my opinion, is proved guilty of murder in the first degree; and it only remains for you to see that justice is meted out." The prosecuting attorney, bowing slightly, sat down.

There was a rustling noise in the court-room, as all eyes were turned towards the attorney for the defence. It was noticed that he was very pale, almost as pale as the prisoner himself; and that the hand he raised to protect his eyes from the sunlight, trembled slightly.

Evans leaned towards the prisoner. "Hector," he whispered "is Mrs. Blake out there in the court-room?"

"No," answered McDonald in a dull voice, "she isn't there. There's no old woman out there—not one."

The attorney for the defence removed his eyeglasses, and polished them absently with his handkerchief. Looking about him on all sides hastily, he rose slowly to his feet. What was going on within him at that moment? He seemed calm enough; and

yet behind those enigmatic glasses his eyes were flashing strangely, beneath that unruffled waistcoat his heart was beating great waves of blood up into his head. He was torn between the two wild horses —Hope and Despair. His mind was a desolate land of despondency; but somewhere in his soul, a spark of optimism was smouldering. The feet of Fact failed to support him but he felt vaguely that the psychological moment was at hand. Far back in the court-room, a man with a beautiful, girlish face and large, luminous eyes placed two fingers to his lips.

“ ‘Our Father Who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name,’ ” murmured the lawyer. “ ‘Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.’ ”

And then, at that very instant, a voice rang through the court-room; a voice that sounded strangely like his own and yet was somehow different. He looked about him wildly to see who had spoken—to see who it was that had just addressed the jury. All faces were turned his way; all eyes were fixed upon him. This must be the voice of God! “ ‘Our Father, Who art in Heaven,’ ” he murmured through trembling lips.

And the voice reiterated: “Gentlemen of the Jury.”

"‘Hallowed be Thy name,’” muttered Evans.

“Hector McDonald is innocent!” said the voice. And then, as the pale lips of the lawyer continued to form the words of the Lord’s Prayer, the voice, keeping pace with them, grew clearer, louder. And the faces of the people were turned his way, a multitude of eyes were fixed upon him; it seemed as though this were not God’s voice, but were really all his own. And everything that followed was like a dream. The court-room appeared to be floating in mist; the spectators were as shadows; all things became vague, unreal, except this wandering voice—this voice of God that gave him strength.

“Gentlemen of the Jury,” said the voice: “The prisoner is innocent. I can prove that he is innocent, but first I must tell you the story of how all this came to pass.

“Five years ago, in the town of M——, there was a circus which had stopped there for a few days. In the side-show of this circus were three men. One was a dwarf, called Tweedledee; another was a giant, who went by the name of Hercules; while ‘Echo’ was a ventriloquist, who wished to give up his calling and go out into the world. Tweedledee knew this, as he knew everything, and told ‘Echo’

to come with him—saying that they would go out into the world as to a dance; that Adventure would take them by the hand and lead them. Also he persuaded Hercules to go. He is evil; but he has a brain —has Tweedledee.

“Then all three went out into the world together. Tweedledee called himself ‘The Brain,’ Echo ‘The Voice,’ and Hercules ‘The Body.’ ‘Where else in the world could you find *such a Brain, such a Voice, and such a Body?*’ That’s what Tweedledee said.

“These three started out on a career of crime, because the ‘Mind’ was evil. ‘Echo’ would have turned back, but he had to obey the ‘Brain’ and ‘Body.’ What can the voice do without the brain and body? Ah, I’m finding that out—I’m showing God that to-day!

“They murdered the ‘Human Skeleton’ the very first night; they murdered him and hung him up in a pawn-shop—like a clothes dummy they hung him up—and Tweedledee made up a joke, and pinned it on his breast. It was humorous, yet horrible—that joke. It was humorous yet horrible; and all three laughed—but ‘Echo’ shuddered as he laughed.

“They had to leave the country after this. It was

too dangerous to remain. One year they spent in Paris, three others in London; and the wickedness they did would make your blood run cold. You see, Gentlemen of the Jury, Tweedledee dressed himself up like a baby. He was only two feet high. He could pass for one, till you looked deep into his eyes. But 'Echo,' who had always longed for freedom, was further away from it now than ever. The Mind said: 'Do this, do that,' and the poor Voice had to obey.

"Finally they came to New York, Gentlemen of the Jury; and all this time 'Echo' had not had a single hour of freedom. And now he must work again! He must run a parrot-shop, because he could make all parrots talk! That's what Tweedledee ordered, and so he must obey. But worse than that, 'Echo' had to dress himself up like an old woman and learn by heart a thousand different things. Never once could he go out in the sunshine where the shadows dance along before the breeze.

"And this parrot-shop became the centre of crime. First Mr. Glover came and bought a bird. He was murdered in less than a week. Then there was the Arlington boy. McDonald bought *him* a parrot. How Tweedledee hated McDonald, because he used to

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rumple his hair and blow cigarette smoke in his eyes! But he waited patiently. Ah! how he could wait, could Tweedledee!

"One rainy night Hercules left Tweedledee on the Arlingtons' stoop. Miss Arlington had him carried up to the nursery where the poor little boy slept. You can imagine what happened then. It was horrible—horrible! That evening Hercules brought Tweedledee back. Under his nightgown, he had a diamond necklace and several other things.

"You would think, Gentlemen of the Jury, that Tweedledee would have left the city after that. But you don't know Tweedledee. He was never satisfied—never! Besides, he said that he had a long score to settle. One day, when he was out in his baby-carriage, Mr. Graham saw him and took a fancy to him. Several weeks later the old man adopted Tweedledee. That was what he had been waiting for. He knew that Mr. Graham was very wealthy, and that he was McDonald's uncle—and so he laid his plans.

"At that time, McDonald came daily to the parrot-shop. 'Echo' wanted to warn him, but he was afraid of Tweedledee. What did the evil Brain do then? He found out what size shoes the prisoner wore,

and had Hercules construct peculiar stilts with little wooden feet to fit these shoes. The morning that he left for Mr. Graham's, Tweedledee gave his final instructions to Hercules and 'Echo.' Later, when he had gone, McDonald came to the shop and they acted upon these instructions. As luck would have it, the young man had his cane with him—something that even Tweedledee had not foreseen.

"The rest, Gentlemen of the Jury, you can imagine. A drop or two of a sleeping potion in his tea; his cane and shoes taken while he sleeps; Hercules walking on stilts in the garden, stilts pushed into McDonald's shoes; Tweedledee giving the signal; the giant climbing through the open window and striking the old man down with the prisoner's cane—all quite simple, Gentlemen of the Jury, quite simple."

The voice died away, and the lips of the lawyer ceased to move. For a moment there was dead silence in the court-room; and then, like the wind howling through a wilderness, a great shout of laughter rang out. Now the prosecuting attorney was on his feet, his face working convulsively.

"Your Honour! Gentlemen of the Jury!" he cried. "This is too much! The imagination of my legal adversary should be appreciated, but unfortunately this

is a court-room and not a literary circle. Dwarfs disguised as babies, giants walking on stilts, and ventriloquists selling parrots, are all very well in fiction, I suppose. But here we want *facts*. May I ask Mr. Evans what proof he has to back up this truly remarkable story? Can he produce the dwarf dressed as a baby, the ventriloquist selling parrots, the giant walking on stilts? Where are his witnesses?"

There was another shout of laughter, followed by silence. Evans felt that a hundred pairs of eyes were fixed upon him. Bending his head slightly, he murmured devoutly for the fifteenth time: " 'Our Father Who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.' "

Scarcely had his lips begun to move, when the voice spoke again.

"Yes," it said wearily, "I know where Tweedle-dee is, where Hercules is, but 'Echo' has gone away with the wind—the Voice has left them forever! There's a room on the second floor of the boarding-house at 78 Brooke Street. Go there and you will find them. Also, if you need more evidence, lift up the loose board—the second from the door—and under it you will find Mr. Graham's stolen rubies, Mr. Glover's jewellery, and the diamond necklace

that came from the Arlingtons' house. That should be evidence enough to show that I don't lie."

Again the voice died away, but this time no laughter followed in its wake. The tall young lawyer for the defence raised his head; and, beneath his flashing eyeglasses, two red spots glowed brightly.

"Yes, Your Honour," he cried in a voice trembling with excitement—a voice that even the amazed spectators realised had changed—"Yes, Your Honour, I can prove what I say. The real murderers are waiting for you at 78 Brooke Street. I move that this case be adjourned."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE same sunlight, that streamed through the courtroom windows on the last day of McDonald's trial, also sifted through the broken shutters of a dilapidated house on Brooke Street. Like its inmates, this dwelling-place seemed to sleep during the day with lowered eyelids and to awake at nightfall to its habitual career of crime. A house, like a human brain, often gives an outer expression of what goes on within; and the expression of this house, even on a beautiful June day, was sinister and lowering. It seemed daring the passer-by to break its drunken slumber.

Up three flights of creaking stairs, at the end of a dusty hall, was a door that sadly needed varnish—a door with a china knob which bore the finger marks of many a grimy fist. If this uninviting exterior did not warn off the visitor, in a moment more he would find himself in a poorly ventilated little room—a little room that looked out into the street through a single dirty window-pane.

On this afternoon, the sun forced its way through

the broken shutters and fell upon the faded carpet in quivering, uneven bars of light. It illumined the tiny feet of a little figure sitting in a toy chair near the window—a little figure dressed in a child's bathrobe and slippers—a little figure busily engaged in writing in a large blank book which it held on its knees.

Further back, in the shadow, was a double bed; beside it stood a wicker baby-carriage. Sprawled out on the mattress—like some kind of recumbent statue—was the body of a huge man. His head nearly touched the wall on one side; his feet threatened the perambulator on the other. This prostrate giant stared solemnly at the ceiling through white clouds of tobacco smoke, that rose steadily from a large black cigar which he held between his teeth. He appeared to be musing over some puzzling problem, so steadfast was his gaze, so deep were the furrows between his eyes. In reality, he was in the mental stupor of a gorged snake sleeping in the sunshine.

At last the little figure by the window sighed heavily, placed his pencil on the arm of his chair and looked up. "Well, I've finished at last, Hercules," he said in a childish treble.

For a moment there was silence. It was as though

the giant had lost his voice somewhere in that huge body of his, and were groping for it. "Finished what, Tweedledee?" he growled at last.

"Why, our last case, Hercules!" cried the dwarf irritably. "You've slept so much lately that you're only half alive. . . . Our last case—the Graham murder."

"Ah yes, Tweedledee."

"I'm only waiting now till McDonald is convicted. That will add the finishing touch to it. A great case! I've never had one that pleased me more." And Tweedledee rubbed his tiny hands together, while a strange smile lighted up his chubby face.

"You never liked McDonald, did you, Tweedledee?"

"Like him? Like him? I hated him from the first. You've no idea how I hated him! Why, the liberties he took with me! Sometimes I had all I could do to stand them; all I could do not to order you to tear him limb from limb. Sometimes it seemed as though I could not wait until the end. You remember the Human Skeleton, Hercules? Well, even *he* never dared to do the things this fool did. Why, he used to pull my hair, and blow cigarette smoke in my face! Think of that—in the face of Tweedledee! Perhaps

I wouldn't have tried to kill the Arlington baby if it hadn't been for him."

"Well," said Hercules, "you have him now, Tweedledee."

"Yes, I have him now," cried the dwarf. "But it was hard to wait, Hercules. I nearly had you wring his neck a score of times. That day when he said that a monkey might have robbed Glover's body of the jewels. Yes, I was on the point of it then; but I said to myself: 'No, I'll wait!' Killing the body alone is all very well, when you're merely irritated; but when you hate with all your soul—why, then it's a different matter, Hercules. You must kill everything then. What your enemy holds dearest, must also die. If I killed him by your hands, his reputation for good would remain alive. His body only would die; and his friends and his fiancée would cherish his memory. But, on the other hand, when I make the law his executioner, when I brand him as a murderer—why, that's quite different, Hercules. Do you see?"

"Well—partly—partly," said the giant, staring solemnly at the ceiling through a twisting ring of smoke. "Yet you're *proud* of your criminal record, Tweedledee. You've often told me that you write

up every case so carefully because some day you want the whole world to know what you have done."

"Ah," cried the dwarf, "it's so difficult to make you understand anything! You have no ambition but to kill, and then to sleep all day like some animal. Real ambition is dead in you. The body can never understand the mind, for it wishes for nothing beyond the grave. The mind would live always if it could. Death is a horrible phantom that overshadows it. Sometimes the mind seizes religion as a weapon to use against this phantom; sometimes it seeks to create for itself a prolonged mental life in music, in art, in literature—in *crime*. That is what I am doing. I want to be taken seriously by the world some day—after I've gone out of the world. I want to leave something behind me that will live. Sometimes it is only by murder that we can perpetuate life. I am writing the story of my existence in blood, so that many generations will tremble at it."

"But all the newspapers have big stories about McDonald," said the giant in a sleepy voice. "It seems to me that you've made him famous, Tweedledee."

"Famous! Just for a moment, that's all. A mushroom that springs up in a single night, and that dies

in a single day. But lasting fame? Nonsense! He apparently commits a crime in a blundering fashion—with no more artistic feeling than a butcher killing a steer. On the very next day, he is arrested; and two months later, he goes to the electric chair. A fine career in crime to give lasting fame! No, to be remembered, one must create something new—something quite out of the ordinary—something such as I have done. Here in this book are twelve murders, described by the murderer—each one a masterpiece. And the writing of them is good, very good. To express, one must know and feel! I have known all this; and I have felt all this."

"And still, Tweedledee," said the giant, "why is it that you insist upon destroying all evidence and yet keep that book about you? Suppose it were found?"

"No fear of that. Who looks in a baby-carriage for evidence? Why, it's safer than those rubies under that board. Never fear, Hercules; I want to live a long time yet, so that I can write a great many more stories before I go. By writing them, I gain immortality of the brain. But there are other things that we have to fear, Hercules—other things."

"What things, Master?"

Tweedledee put his hands over his face, and was silent for a moment. When he lowered them again, his whole expression had changed. There *had* been a certain dreamy light in his eyes; but now it was gone—they were cold and glittering. He bent towards Hercules, and his face was alive with some great emotion.

“It’s ‘Echo’,” he whispered. “I can’t hold him much longer. He’s slipping away from me fast. I can feel it every time he speaks. The other day I found him talking to that little wooden image he used to have. He still thinks it has his brain. He’s afraid of me; and that’s all I can hold him with—just fear. He’s growing discontented—I can see it in his eyes.”

“But ‘Echo’ wouldn’t dare—” cried the giant.

“No, he wouldn’t. He’s afraid of me; and yet we have to trust him too much. He liked McDonald. I could see that he did. And then again, Hercules, it’s always the voice that betrays the body and the brain. That’s been ringing in my head constantly these last few days—it is the voice that betrays the body and the brain. Of course we had to trust him in this. We had to wait until they convicted McDonald before we got away. The law requires a

victim, and then it is satisfied. I wanted news badly ; and 'Echo' is the only one of us who was safe on the streets. And yet I'm afraid of him—I'm afraid of my own voice."

"Tell me," said the giant very slowly, and as he spoke his great red fingers opened and shut,—"tell me, Tweedledee ; couldn't we go through life without a voice? Perhaps, before we reach Paris, we could lose 'The Voice'?"

"So I was thinking. It's safer without a voice. But ssh! I hear him in the hallway now. He's come back to tell us about the trial. We won't let him out of our sight again, Hercules—remember that!"

A light tap sounded on the door. "Come in, Echo ; come in!" cried Tweedledee.

There was an instant of hesitation, and then the door swung slowly open. But there was no "Echo" waiting on the threshold—no "Echo" with trembling lips and luminous eyes—no "Echo" of the wandering voice. No, it was quite a different sight the dwarf now saw—a sight that seemed to turn him to stone on the instant—a sight that for once quite paralysed "The Brain." Five large policemen blocked the passage-way, and five pairs of steadfast eyes were fixed on Tweedledee.

For a moment the silence was unbroken, and then there came a muffled roar from the bed. A huge body leaped through the air, and landed in its stocking-feet in the middle of the room. And, as had happened in the side-show, Hercules became terrible. Foam gathered about his lips; the veins on his forehead became fat twisting worms; he lifted two tremendous fists above his head. He stood there for an instant, bending at the waist, about to hurl himself forward, when five hands were extended towards him—five steady hands holding revolvers in their palms.

"That's the man," said an authoritative voice from the hall. "Arrest him, and the little one, too!"

"Drop those hands and bring your wrists together!" commanded one of the policemen, stepping forward. "Come on, now! Be quick about it!" He put the muzzle of his revolver against the giant's chest.

For a moment it seemed that Hercules, in spite of the odds against him, in spite of the five menacing revolvers, still intended to fight his way out of the room. Perhaps, if Tweedledee had not seized him by the coat-sleeve, it would have been too late.

"It's all right, Hercules," he whispered shrilly.

"Do as they tell you; put your wrists together!"

The giant still hesitated, and then, with a deep sigh, lowered his two enormous hands. There came a sharp snap, and the hairy wrists were circled by steel bands. Now a policeman held him by either arm. Tweedledee, his face ghastly white, his eyes shining like two red hot coals, was in the grasp of a third policeman who looked down upon his tiny captive with a broad smile.

By this time the man who had spoken authoritatively in the hallway—a man who had stationed himself behind the others—entered the room. He was tall, wore eyeglasses, and had a crimson spot on either cheek. He looked at Hercules—that gigantic figure standing with drooping head and dull eyes; he looked at Tweedledee—so tiny in the child's bathrobe, with white upturned face and parted lips; and, as he turned to the door again, his glasses seemed trying to reflect the triumph in his heart.

"Come here, Tom!" said he to one of the men.
"See if that second board isn't loose!"

Soon a policeman was on his knees. Another moment and he had pried up the board, and, putting his hand cautiously in the black aperture, pulled out of it two small boxes and a chamois bag. The tall

thin young man turned towards Tweedledee. His face, at that instant, appeared to the dwarf like a skull wearing eyeglasses.

"Well, I guess this settles your case," said he.

The little face looked up into his, the glittering eyes were covered by a veil of long black lashes; and then the dwarf's shrill, penetrating voice echoed through the room.

"Did Hector McDonald turn State's evidence?" he cried.

"What!" said Evans. For the second time that day, he felt the solid earth giving way beneath his feet.

"Did he turn State's evidence?" asked Tweedledee, giving the young lawyer a bitter, sidelong look. "He was the one who put us up to this. We were to get the rubies; he was to get the old man's fortune."

What made the lawyer's eyes leave Tweedledee's; what made him turn to the copy-book lying on the arm of the toy chair; what made him step forward and pick it up? We do not know. Perhaps it was the last touch of the psychological moment—the moment when he could not lose.

And then Tweedledee, for the first time, lost con-

trol of himself. As he saw the lawyer pick up the book, as he saw him start to open it, he wrenched himself out of the grasp of the smiling policeman and ran forward.

“Give it to me!” he screamed, dancing up and down before Evans like a puppet on wires. “It’s mine—so give it to me!”

And the young lawyer’s cheeks again turned crimson. Holding the book just above Tweedledee’s twitching fingers, he shook his head slowly and solemnly at the dwarf.

“No, no, my little friend!” said he. “We’ll need this, I imagine, before we’re through with you.”

CHAPTER XXX

A PRISON and an insane asylum are the two institutions of man most capable of throwing a shadow over the handiwork of God. No matter how brightly the sun may shine, no matter how gaily the river winds along, no matter how sweet is the breath from the meadow, the passer-by still experiences an unhealthy feeling of mingled pity and repulsion—an urgent desire to hurry on his way.

Behind those barred windows on our right, lurks the face of leering insanity; behind those barred windows on our left, we see the ferocious eyes of crime. They are as closely allied as brother to brother. Inseparable tragedians in the play of life, their true horror rests not so much in what they have succeeded in accomplishing as in what they might be capable of accomplishing.

What the healthy mind can understand, is not so terrible as the vague imagery invariably connected with one's thoughts on mental abnormality. A diseased brain is much more horrible than a diseased body—just as much more horrible as is a bad in-

stinct in comparison to a bad face. The one lurks behind in the shadow, calling forth imagination; the other appears boldly in the sunlight. Hamlet, playing the rôle of insanity, discovers that he has actually become a murderer. The paths of both cross each other repeatedly through the jungle of the world.

In every prison, just as in every man, there are chambers more terrible than others—chambers given over to death. In man, these chambers are sometimes filled with tender thoughts, new-born sorrows, dawning ambitions, worn-out lust. In prison, these chambers are filled with condemned murderers, old and feeble, young and pulsing with life, repentant and fearful, bitter and resigned. The walls of these chambers have echoed to laughter, to weeping, to shouts and to groans. Suddenly the door opens, like a huge mouth, and they are vomited out into the cesspool of death. The place, that has known them, knows them no more.

Tweedledee sat all alone in one of these cells, staring intently at the barred window. He was waiting for the morning as for his only friend—and yet it took so long, so very long to come. He felt like a spider watching a huge heel descending upon him

slowly—a wounded spider that could only lie here and quiver slightly. He had been watching this uplifted foot for weeks—this foot of the law that hovered over him—this foot that now was just above his head. When the morning wiped out the stars and painted the sky anew, it would descend and crush him. But the hours were so slow in passing—so very, very slow.

And he must play his part to the last. There should be no weakness for him. He would show all these full-grown men how a dwarf could die. And because of this resolution, because of this final effort to be taken seriously, he had boasted in the court-room. Ah, yes, how he had boasted! How he had dwelt on each one of his crimes! How vividly he had painted them before the staring eyes of the jurors, before the awed silence of the people, before the judge, who had listened intently to his every word!

Yes, they had all listened to him with horror. And yet that was not quite the kind of feeling he had wanted to inspire; not quite the kind of feeling in their breasts that he had wished was there. They had looked at him with terror, it is true; and yet also with repulsion—as a thing apart from others.

And as he had watched this feeling grow in all

these white faces, as he had looked about him on every side, suddenly it had seemed to him that the years had rolled back—that he was once more on his platform in the side-show—that the prosecuting attorney was pointing him out to the people, was dwelling on his pitiful size and weakness, as the spieler had used to do. But now these materialistic children of the world could not laugh at their doll, at their wicked doll gone mad; no, nor could they fear it. It was too wicked to laugh at, too tiny to fear; and it could only be repulsive in a pitiful sort of way—a very disappointing doll indeed!

And when he had realised that all his life had been wasted; that never, no matter what he did, would he be taken as seriously as others; that he was doomed to die a miniature death as he had lived a miniature life: a puppet pulled into his grave by evil strings—when, as I say, he had realised this fully, he became laughingly terrible in the witness-stand, railing against God in a shrill squeak with his tiny fists held high above his head. And then, for the first time, laughter had echoed through the court-room—laughter that had been soon hushed, but still laughter—laughter that would ring in the dwarf's ears until death. It was his last message

from the world—a message that long ago, with evil fingers, had woven the pattern of his life.

That had been the last day of the trial; the day when Hercules and he had been condemned to death. Now the morning was coming slowly out of the East. It bore a shroud for him in its bosom—a tiny white shroud. Why did it not hasten to him, as to a friend? Didn't it know that he was breaking down at last; that the wicked doll had been discarded by the children with a laugh, and was to be thrown out into the universal dust-bin? Surely it knew these things; then why did it tarry so?

And now a new terror leaped up in Tweedledee's mind; leaped up like a green flame illuminating everything with a ghastly, sickly light. He realised how lonely he was in this cell, and what a terrible thing it was to die a doll—a mechanical doll. He would have no part in it. The time was set, and when the hands of the clock touched that hour—the hour apart from all other hours; the hour beyond which all others vanished, falling into the impenetrable chasm of eternity—when the sentinel before the gates of time struck out this hour with its brazen club, why, then tall, strange men would come into his cell, would put their great hands on him and carry

him away. He might struggle, he might cry out, and it would cause scarcely a ripple in the fast flowing tide. He was powerless, and he felt that it was bearing him away.

Where was his voice now? It had betrayed him; it had gone out to join the wandering echoes of the world. Only the body and brain would die. Hercules had been loyal to the last, and, sitting in the court-room, had seemed scarcely conscious of what was going on. And yet he had received more attention from the people than had Tweedledee. They had marvelled at his size, his animal ferocity, and his great fists lying clenched on his knees. Yes, to them, he was the one to be taken seriously—not the childish figure by his side.

And Tweedledee, realising his life's failure, still feared to die. His active mind rushed forward to the barrier of death, and, finding it too high to climb, hurried back again. What was on the other side, waiting for him? Was it possible that his burning egotism would vanish from the world? If not, why was it crying out with such a terrible voice: "I must live! I must live! I must live!"

He was like a man entering a cold river bathed in obscurity. Behind him is the familiar bank of life;

before him a swift, silent current flowing to an unknown sea. Already the water is above his knees. He would turn back, but he is powerless. Something clutches him by the ankle and drags him further out. It is the hand of Time.

Suddenly Tweedledee started. He noticed that the window was growing grey. Shivering slightly, he wondered how long he would have to wait. Brighter and brighter shone the light, and, falling on the tiny dwarf crouching on the bed, rested in his black beady eyes. Now the sky was splashed with crimson; a crimson that sifted through the bars and touched his pale cheeks with Nature's colouring. For a moment he looked like a child again—a child waking up early on Christmas morning to see what Santa Claus has left him.

Soon the prison began to show signs of life. Outside, in the corridor, came the confused sound of muffled footsteps and muttering voices. Somewhere a heavy door shut with a dull clang. The footsteps and voices grew clearer and louder. For a moment, they stopped at the dwarf's cell.

"Good-bye, Tweedledee," said a deep, rumbling voice. "It's Hercules, and he's going home. I'll wait for you a little while, but hurry, Tweedledee!"

The footsteps passed slowly by. They died away at last, and all was stillness. Meanwhile the tiny figure on the bed had not moved or spoken. It was like a large wax doll, lying in the morning light.

All was silence in the prison—a dark and brooding silence—the silence that marks the fulfilment of the laws of man. It lasted for several minutes; and then, as a little cloud of smoke rose above the wall, a cry rose with it from a hundred straining throats—a cry that seemed trying to force a passage through the very gates of Heaven. Three times this strange cry cut the stillness like a sword; and then, at last, it died away. Thus was Hercules sent forward through the dark portals of the Unknown Land.

But now other footsteps were sounding in the passage. Again they stopped, but this time the door was opened wide. Tall men entered. They approached the dwarf. "It's your turn now, Tweedledee."

The figure, that resembled a waxen doll lying in the sunlight, moved. Its lips opened and shut convulsively, and its pointed tongue could be seen vibrating in its mouth. It seemed trying to speak, although not a sound escaped. Perhaps, in this last extremity, its voice was also dead.

"Come, Tweedledee."

The dwarf set his teeth, scowled at the faces looking down at him, and tried to rise to his feet. Alas, in this final effort to be taken seriously—to walk bravely to his death like another man, to show these giants how a dwarf could die—his poor pitiful body failed him; and, swaying once or twice, he fell headlong to the floor.

Then these men whom he hated—these men whom he had wished to impress by his fortitude, by the exalted strength of his ego—these men bent over him with a look of pity, and, picking him up in their strong arms, carried him, half fainting—a miserable, pathetic figure—to his death.

And there was another solemn silence within the prison walls, another little puff of smoke that glided up into a waiting cloud, another inhuman cry that rose and fell and rose again. Then the tragedy was over. Men turned to their daily tasks, and soon forgot Tweedledee.

CHAPTER XXXI

ON THE last night of Tweedledee's life, far out in the country, a solitary figure was walking along a tiny path. At either side, tall pines stretched their bristling arms above the traveller as though to hide him from the curious moon; while before him in the distance, glistening through a maze of tree-trunks, lay a sheet of sparkling silver—a luminous lake beneath the stars.

For many nights "Echo" had wandered through the fields, as happy as the wind at play, following his fitful fancy, dancing in the moonlight, singing in the forest, chasing each stealthy shadow to the skirts of Mother Sorrow where all such gloomy children should remain. But in the daytime he was careful not to sing, dance, or shout, for on his shoulder was a little wooden demon—a little wooden demon that whispered in his ear and told him what to do. And he was careful not to disobey it—not to brave the bright sunshine and the passing people, not to look into the eyes of man—for it was his brain that thus commanded, and, by obeying, he felt the

dark domain of reason—the domain of Tweedledee—quite vanish at the touch of the rising moon.

Yes, when Nature nightly painted that pale portrait in the sky, he was free—free to follow the dancing fireflies through the black and dewy bushes, through the host of silent shadows, through the multitude of tree-trunks. And it was at these times that the little wooden demon on his shoulder—the little wooden demon with legs like a goat and the face of an old man—fell fast asleep. It was useless to ask it questions for it would not answer; no, not until the Morning entered through Her fiery gates.

The fantastic figure began to bound forward along the little moonlit path—the path between the long rows of silent pine-trees which seemed to join hands above it like children in a childish game. Larger and brighter grew the disc of silver, till now the wild, dishevelled traveller could see the great stars, like jewels, resting on its bosom. A moment more, and he had broken through the clinging bushes—bushes that with tiny terror-stricken fingers sought to hold him back. Soon he was lying on the grass, looking out over the expanse of water. Not a breath of air caused a ripple on that peaceful surface; not a branch murmured overhead. The tiny lake at this moment

—from some great height—must have looked like a drop of dew glistening on a shadowy leaf.

“Echo” lifted his face toward the sky, and it was as beautiful in the pale moonlight as the face of your own joyous youth. Then he pulled himself slowly forward till his shoulders were over the bank. He fixed his large luminous eyes on the black silent water beneath. As he stared down, trying to pierce the shadows, the little wooden demon could be seen nodding on his shoulder. Evidently it had fallen fast asleep.

For some time he lay motionless in the soft grass; till finally the moon, rising over the treetops, seemed floating like a golden goblet on the surface of the water beneath his eyes. Then, very slowly and cautiously, a thin shadowy arm reached out above this disc of steady light; groping, nervous fingers tried to seize it, but could not quite reach the glittering prize. The fantastic figure writhed forward like a snake, and again the long arm shot out.

For a moment it hovered above its fancied treasure, and then plunged down with a splash of snow-white foam. There came a loud, frenzied cry, a cry that seemed echoed by a host of brothers—brothers hiding in the forest, in the treetops, in the valleys—

and something long and black rolled off the bank; something that turned the water into gleaming patches of light.

Once more a thin, shadowy arm appeared; an arm that, this time, seemed grasping at the sky. Soon it disappeared and the foam and tiny waves changed to ripples—ripples that the moon danced on like a silver boat. In turn these ripples subsided slowly; and the silver boat became a pale and agitated face—a face of many lines and wrinkles—the face of age and grief.

A moment later, these lines and wrinkles were erased by the soothing hand of Time. And, if another traveller had stood upon the bank looking down, he would have seen nothing in this pale, floating face beneath him—nothing of what had gone before.

CHAPTER XXXII

ONE beautiful night in August, two figures might have been seen strolling leisurely across a shadowy lawn. Behind them was a large white house, brightly lighted; before them, a little silver lake of flashing waves; above them, a sky of fleecy clouds and flickering stars.

As they drew nearer the lake—now in light and now in shadow, like the personification of two united lives—it was evident that one was a young man in the early twenties, and the other a girl of barely nineteen.

Now they had reached the boardwalk which extended out over the water for perhaps twenty yards. Here it ended in a little bridge—a bridge that connected it with a large float. The top of this float was scarcely a foot above the lake; and at every wave, it rocked slightly with an easy, soothing motion. Here two chairs were placed, so that they looked out at the glittering hosts of tiny moonbeams riding on the ripples, at the dark silent army of pinetrees on the opposite bank.

The man and the girl advanced slowly along the wooden walk. Soon they reached the sloping bridge, and, descending it, sat down in the chairs. For a moment there was silence—a silence broken only by the wind humming through the pine trees, the waves lapping against the float, and the creaking of a loose board. Finally it was the girl who spoke.

"Do you like father's new place, Hector?" she asked.

"Like it?" cried the young man enthusiastically. "Why, I think it's the most beautiful place that I've ever seen. You can't imagine, Dorothy, how wonderful it seems after what I've been through."

"It must have been terrible, Hector! I know that it was terrible for me, just knowing that you were there."

"Yes," said McDonald thoughtfully; "and yet I'm glad I went through it. I don't mean because it made my stories acceptable to the magazines—no, it isn't that. It's because it has made me enjoy life so much more. Life is only very precious when one's in danger of losing it, Dorothy. God creates joy and sorrow in this world by contrast. I learned a lot in prison."

"What, for instance, Hector?"

"Well," said the young man slowly, "I learned about myself for one thing. Before I went to jail, I considered myself a genius—a man above all others in my profession. You see, being so much alone, I had deluded myself with that idea for months. The germ of ego grows in the garden of solitude till sometimes a man goes mad. It is only by encountering others that we can gauge our strength. But I encountered Death, Dorothy—a grisly monster who devours millions of egos, as he has devoured mine."

"How was that, Hector?"

"Well, at first, when I thought that I could prove my innocence, I was more egotistical than ever. That was my supreme height of madness, as those newspaper articles show. But finally a shadow fell across my mind—a shadow that grew larger day by day. At last I knew this shadow to be Death. And then it seemed that my soul was stripped bare, that I could see it as plainly as though it were lying in my open hand. I read my work as through another man's eyes, and I realised for the first time that it was commonplace. Perhaps it was as good as the average, but still very commonplace—not work that merited the sacrifice of life, the sacrifice that I had to pay. And when I knew this, it was terrible, Dorothy!"

It seemed to me that I had starved for nothing; that I was about to die for nothing. I was like some fanatic, tied to the stake, who at the last moment loses his faith."

"That *must* have been terrible, Hector," said Dorothy with her dark eyes fixed on the young man's face. "But you *do* write wonderfully."

"Women fan the flame only to quench it with their tears," said McDonald. "I grant you this, though: I *do* write as well as the average. But, Dorothy, I hadn't really lived because I hadn't really suffered. Of course I had been hungry now and then, but I had never really suffered with the mind. That's what makes us, or breaks us. For instance, Tweedle-dee's written confessions—the book that saved my life, Dorothy. Well, one page of that is worth more than anything that I've ever written. And why is it? Because he's suffered; because he's lived it all—mind and body."

"Perhaps. But I hope you wouldn't be like he was, dear!"

"No; I'd never pay that price. But some day he may be taken seriously by the world."

"How is Mr. Evans, Hector?"

"Jim? You should see him now! He goes about

with his head up in the air, and never says a word about where his information came from at the trial. ‘Legal Inspiration’ I believe he calls it, when they ask him. ‘Mrs. Blake’ never got any credit for it.”

“But, Hector, what became of ‘Echo’? Didn’t they ever find him?”

“No; and I hope they never will. He’s probably out in the country somewhere, playing like a child, dancing along with the wind and chasing the wandering shadows home. He’s told me what he wanted to do many a time. We had many a long talk together, he and I. God bless ‘Echo,’ wherever he may be.”

For some time they were silent looking out over the silver water and listening to the tiny waves lapping against the dock. Suddenly the moon, like a huge silver beetle, broke through a spider-web of clouds, and, rising higher in the sky, looked down on the lake at its feet. Stretching out from the float was a narrow path of gleaming light, like a giant’s mailed arm; and on this luminous path, dancing towards them, riding on the crest of each tiny wave, was a dark object no larger than one’s hand. Turning, twisting, bobbing up and down, it advanced ever nearer at the touch of the breeze.

McDonald rose to his feet. "Dorothy," said he, "the waters are bringing us something. Perhaps it's a peace offering from the demon of the deep."

He advanced to the edge of the float, and knelt on the damp boards. Leaning forward quickly, he pulled the little dark object out of the agitated water. For a moment he held it in his hands, examining it carefully by the light of the moon.

"I was right!" he cried at last. "This *will* bring us luck! I've never seen anything like it before. Perhaps it's the familiar demon that watches over our lives—the demon that protects us in our hours of danger and guards us in our hours of sleep. Perhaps, with these little wooden fingers, he has unravelled many an ugly knot in my existence—a knot that I had never guessed was there."

As he finished speaking, he walked over to the girl. He held out, in the palms of his hands, a little water-soaked figure which seemed familiar to both—vaguely familiar, yet unaccountably so.

Dorothy gazed at it in surprise. "It *does* look like a demon!" she said. "Why, it has legs like a goat and the face of an old man!"

THE END

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